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Samira K. Mehta April 12, 2013

Beyond Chrismukkah: A Cultural History of the Christian/Jewish Blended Family from 1965 to 2010

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B.A., Swarthmore College, 2000
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An abstract of

A dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the James T. Laney School of Graduate Studies of Emory University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
in the Graduate Division of Religion, American Religious Cultures

2013

Abstract

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By Samira K. Mehta

"Beyond Chrismukkah: A Cultural History of the Christian/Jewish Blended Family in the United States from 1965 to 2010," analyzes the shifts in cultural understandings of Christian/Jewish families in late 20th-century American culture in light of changing understandings of ethnicity, particularly the turn to multiculturalism in the 1990s. By examining the strategic use of "religion" and "culture" by commentators on interfaith family life in religious institutions, producers of popular culture, and members of interfaith families themselves, I argue that multiculturalism creates new terms and new definitions through which interfaith families can shape their practices and identities. Ultimately, I conclude that the rise of multiculturalism provides a new moral logic through which interfaith families can develop blended identities. I place both of these projects in the broader sphere of American political discussions about religion and its place as a marker of identity in American life.

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In her book *Half/Life: Tales of Jew-ish Homes*, Laurel Snyder refers to her "muddled mishpocha." I have my own muddled mishpocha, spanning two countries and more religions. I would like to thank them because not a one of them has ever asked me either "What are you going to do with that?" or "When will you be done?" Asa, Greta, and Maggie Mae Mehta have cheered my days. My sister, Katya Mehta, has always believed in me. My mother, Linda Hotchkiss Mehta, is an editor by profession and has read as many drafts of this dissertation as she once read bedtime stories. My father, Romesh C. Mehta, died in my last year of this project. I am not sure what he would have made of the dissertation, though I am sure that he would have been proud, on principle. It is to him, to my mother, and to their interfaith marriage that I dedicate this work.

Table of Contents

Introduction

In 1997, the Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court ruled to restrict Jeffery P. Kendall's right to teach his children about his own religion.[1] At first glance, this case seems to illustrate violation of the principle of separation of church and state, but upon closer examination, the suit brought against Kendall by his former wife, Barbara Zeitler Kendall, instead demonstrates the complicated dynamics of inter-religious families in the United States.[2] When Jewish Zeitler married Catholic Kendall in 1988, they agreed that any children of the marriage would be raised as Jews. According to the court records, in 1991 Mr. Kendall joined the Boston Church of Christ. He came to believe that those who did not accept both Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior and the particular teachings of the Boston Church of Christ were "damned to go to Hell," a place characterized by "weeping and gnashing of teeth."[3] The defendant testified that he would do anything in his power to save his three children from hell by bringing them to Christ. Apparently, this did not cause major disruption to the marriage until 1994, when Mrs. Kendall and the children adopted Orthodox Judaism.[4]

Shortly thereafter, Mrs. Kendall filed for divorce as a result of the irreversible breakdown of the marriage, and in 1995 the court became involved in navigating the religious training of the children. Ultimately, Judge Christina Harms ruled to restrict how Mr. Kendall could present his religion to his children. While the parents were allowed to

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[1] *Barbara Zeitler Kendall V. Jeffery P. Kendall*, 426 Mass. 238; 687 N.E.2d 1228; 1997 Mass. LEXIS 408 SJC-07427 (Supreme Judicial Court of Massachusetts 1997).
[2] Ibid.
[3] Ibid.
[4] Ibid.

share their own beliefs with the children as long as those beliefs did not alienate the children from the other parent, the court ruled that:

> The [defendant] shall not take the children to his church (whether to church services or Sunday School or church educational programs); nor engage them in prayer or bible study if it promotes rejection rather than acceptance, of their mother or their own Jewish self-identity. The [defendant] shall not share his religious beliefs with the children if those beliefs cause the children significant emotional distress or worry about their mother or about themselves.[5]

The court specifically proscribed Mr. Kendall's behavior, noting that while he was allowed to hang pictures of Jesus Christ on his walls, he was not allowed to "take the children to religious services where they receive the message that adults or children who do not accept Jesus Christ as their lord and savior are destined to burn in hell."[6] Despite the Court's attempt to safeguard the children's religious observance, the Court did stipulate that Mr. Kendall could have the children with him at "events involving family traditions such as Christmas and Easter."[7]

Embedded in this court case are a number of assumptions about what constitutes "religion" and what constitutes "family traditions." Judge Harms insisted that Mr. Kendall must respect his children's religious identity, but she also defined Christmas and Easter as family traditions, rather than as religious practices. Thus, the Massachusetts judge's decision was a natural outgrowth of discussions about interfaith families throughout the 1980s and 1990s, as religious leaders, family members, and the media moved from conversations about the phenomenon of interfaith marriage to questions about how

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[5] Ibid.
[6] Ibid.
[7] *Barbara Zeitler Kendall V. Jeffery P. Kendall*, 426 Mass. 238; 687 N.E.2d 1228; 1997 Mass. LEXIS 408.

interfaith families would formulate a religious identity. There were two broad approaches—one camp that argued children must have a single religious identity, which was more in line with arguments from the previous decades; while another opinion argued there were innovative ways to combine Christian and Jewish traditions in the home without confusing or damaging children. Like the aforementioned court case, both of these positions implicitly turned on definitions of key terms and concepts like "religion," "culture," and "ethnicity."

The boundaries of plural religious identities, therefore, were deeply tied to questions of what identity requires protection—a religious identity or a cultural one. These terms were defined and deployed in debates about how to determine the religious lives of interfaith families, used strategically to describe a constellation of Jewish and Christian practices and beliefs according to whether those arguing sought to restrict a family to one religious identity and to define which religion should "win out" and become the family's sole tradition, or whether it was possible, potentially even preferable, to combine multiple practices in a family home. This dissertation explores the distinctions drawn between religion and culture and the strategic purposes that those distinctions serve, in order to find a new paradigm in which these families might be understood.

The project also explores the implication of framing interfaith marriage in the opposing terms of religion and culture. When defined as culture, interfaith marriage can serve as a mode of assimilating into a dominant Protestant society, as Jewish spouses adapt to their Protestant partner's world or as, together, Catholic and Jewish spouses "meet in the middle" in the neutral territory of the self-defined individual, free from the

constraints of family and heritage. Alternatively, cultural definitions can allow the interfaith couple to move into the space of multiculturalism. Multiculturalism has its own logics, and chapter five will explore those understandings of what culture entails. In this world, religious practices, already heavily shaped by the logic of the marketplace, are framed as equivalent and consumed in parallel (or in combination) to create new blended (and yet optional) religious identities. Particularities of meaning and understanding may have been lost in this multicultural understanding of culture, but a new moral framework has been enacted around practices previously the sole domain of Christian or Jewish experience.

Like the court decision above, arguments for Judaism and Christianity as religions tend to privilege theology over practice. In looking at the relationship between Christianity and Judaism, for instance, these conversations resulted in assertions that Christians could ascribe to everything that occurred in Judaism because Christianity was Judaism "plus Christ." This attitude thus made the decision of religious affiliation easy, precisely because it discounted both worship practices and any understanding of a Jewish culture to which the Christian partner could not seamlessly convert (and which Reform authorities could neither easily define nor, in point of fact, completely discount).

Why, though, study interfaith marriage between Christians and Jews? After all, American Jews make up a comparatively small portion of Americans population—approximately 1.7% of the population in 2007.[8] Somewhere between 40 to 50% new Jewish marriages are interfaith. Why, then, study a group of families that make up less

[8] The Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, *US Religious Landscape Survey: Religious Affiliation Diverse and Dynamic* (Washington, DC: The Pew Research Center, February 2008), 5.

than 1% of the population of the United States? While Christian/Jewish interfaith marriage may affect a comparatively small portion of the population, interfaith marriage more generally is increasingly common. According to The Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, in 2007, 37% of American marriages are interfaith.[9] Those numbers reflect many kinds of religious blends beyond the Christian/Jewish marriage (including marriages across Protestant family groups), but they indicate that Americans are finding spouses from a across the pluralistic American religious landscape and finding ways to create homes and families that bring any number of traditions into contact with each other, not just in the public square, but in the most intimate spaces of life. Moreover, while these decisions may be highly personal, the negotiations that they entail on the family and communal level speak not only to how these families view themselves religiously, but also to how they define themselves in the distinctly American sphere.

Pluralism in American public life has often traded on three realities. First, all of the religious traditions in question shape themselves, as much as possible, to a Protestant norm, for instance, by fitting appropriate readings or prayers into the format of a Protestant worship service. Second, truth claims are kept out of the public square—religious groups seek common ground, for example, by agreeing to work together on a soup kitchen, but also by not discussing real differences in underlying value systems or core beliefs. These compromises in public are considered acceptable because, thirdly, it is understood that each group can retreat to its own private space, be it family or religious home, where its members will no longer need to compromise. Interfaith family life removes that private space, forcing people to negotiate competing practices and truth

[9] Ibid., 8.

claims in their most private space. Families need to decide how to interact with their distinct traditions, and religious organizations have to decide how to treat inter-religiously blended families.

This dissertation asks how American Christian/Jewish blended families have found ways to bring religious practice into their homes: how they have been allowed to; how they have wanted to; how they are imagined; and what they have done. It uses the Christian/Jewish example because those are the mixed marriages that dominate the American imagination in a variety of ways, from literature to film to television and other forms of popular culture. From 1965 to 2010, the religious landscape of the United States was undergoing some fundamental shifts, and this dissertation tracks the implications of religious seeking and multiculturalism for the options available to religiously blended families.

Interfaith families appear overtly: in best-selling children's classics like *Are You There God? It's Me, Margaret* and on prime-time television, such as the shows *Bridget Loves Bernie* in the 1970s and *The OC* in the 2000s. Newspapers across the country carry holiday issues addressing how interfaith couples handle their "December dilemmas" of whether to celebrate Christmas, Hanukkah, or both. Though they make up a statistically small number of the interfaith marriages in America today, Christian/Jewish marriages are the dominant mode of imagining religiously blended marriage, and therefore offer the most insight into how they are understood in American culture more broadly.

In this project, I explore marriage between Christians and Jews in the United States, from 1965 to 2010. The dissertation pays close attention to the very concepts of "Christian" and "Jew," because, depending on the source in question, they hold a

multiplicity of meanings: from affiliation with a specific Christian or Jewish organization to an individual's nebulous connection to a sketchily understood identity that is, in that person's framing, identified with anyone from her grandmother to Woody Allen to the Archbishop of Canterbury. In conversations about interfaith family life, traits are characterized as Christian or Jewish without regard for the range of practices in each tradition and sometimes based on stereotypes only loosely connected to historical reality. I have explored how people have used the terms with an eye towards understanding what is at stake in typifying characteristics as being inherently tied to Christian and Jewish identity.

In addition, I have limited the scope of my discussions of religious institutions and leadership. In the Jewish context, I have concentrated on the responses of the Central Committee of American Rabbis, the rabbinical arm of the Reform Movement, and the leadership of the Union for American Hebrew Congregations, the congregational arm of the Reform movement, in terms of their internal conversations, their external statements, and the publications they sponsored. As both the largest American Jewish movement and one of the most liberal, the Reform movement was on the forefront of struggling to respond to interfaith marriage and has, since 1978, made outreach to those in interfaith marriages one of their primary goals. In considering Catholic thought, I have looked specifically at policies on and theologies of marriage that directly impacted interfaith couples in the United States, whether they originated in Rome or with the American Church.

Tracking Protestant thought, even once limited to the Protestant mainline, poses a particular challenge because the various denominations operated (and continue to

operate) independently of each other, as demonstrated in the contemporary moment by their range of reactions to gay marriage. Because I was interested in broad conversations about interfaith marriage and most interested in taking an average of the Protestant position on the subject rather than focusing on individual denominations, I turned to the magazine *The Christian Century*. While the denominations have very different perspectives on the relationship between the individual believer or individual clergy member and the religious hierarchy, the magazine allows a broad view of how the Protestant mainline understood the problem. Although this publication does not give the fine-grade distinctions of whether an individual minister was primarily responsible to his congregation (and therefore to their views on interfaith marriage) or to his bishop, it presents the public conversation on religion. It also highlights the importance of the individual believer as a moral agent in Protestant thought and the ways in which the mainline was considering fears about the institution of marriage. It is in this context that the magazine presents the public Protestant voices on interfaith marriage—the voices to which the American Catholic hierarchy and the Reform leadership would be responding.

Most of the existing scholarship on Christian/Jewish interfaith families examines these families in the context of Jewish community and life. Sylvia Barack Fishman's sociological study *Double or Nothing: Jewish Families and Mixed Marriage* explores the reasons why Jews chose to marry non-Jewish spouses as well as the rates with which and reasons why they affiliate with Jewish institutions and maintain Jewish practices, with the end goal of measuring the impact of interfaith marriage on Jewish continuity in the

United States.[10] In *Still Jewish: A History of Women and Intermarriage in America*, Keren McGinity traces the history of Jewish women marrying gentile men, a group whose experiences she rightly argues have been underexplored. She does so with an eye towards examining how these women maintain a sense of Jewish identity in their lives and towards if and how they transmit that identity to their children.[11]

Lila Corwin Berman uses debates about interfaith marriage as a primary data point in her exploration of how American Jews explained and presented themselves to the rest of American society in *Speaking of Jews: Rabbis, Intellectuals, and the Creation of an American Jewish Public Identity*.[12] Jennifer Thompson's forthcoming *Jewish on Their Own Terms: How Intermarried Couples are Changing American Judaism* uses ethnographic material to do exactly what the title claims—explore the ways in which interfaith couples, often living Jewish lives, are reshaping what it means to be Jewish in contemporary America.[13] These projects are interesting and important work, but they all address interfaith marriage specifically as it relates to American Judaism. While these scholars inform my work, I take the question of interfaith marriage in a different direction, treating it as a phenomenon on in the American religious and secular landscape more broadly. In this way, my work follows that of Anne Rose, whose treatment of interfaith marriage in the nineteenth century in *Beloved Strangers: Interfaith Families in Nineteenth Century America* addresses marriages between Protestants, Catholics, and

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[10] Sylvia Barack Fishman, *Double or Nothing?: Jewish Families and Mixed Marriage* (Brandeis, 2004).
[11] Keren McGinity, *Still Jewish: A History of Women and Intermarriage in America* (NYU Press, 2009).
[12] Lila Corwin Berman, *Speaking of Jews: Rabbis, Intellectuals, and the Creation of an American Public Identity*, 1st ed. (University of California Press, 2009).
[13] Jennifer Thompson, *Jewish on Their Own Terms: How Intermarried Couples Are Changing American Judaism* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2014).

Jews as an American phenomenon, examining them in terms of both gender and the role of the public citizen.[14] In so doing, I carve out a new space that situates interfaith marriage—and the interfaith family—as a distinctly American, always blended, and potentially multicultural phenomenon. Such terms allow an exploration of these families on their own varied terms, free from the structures of a particular religious movement and its stakes.

In considering the impact of multiculturalism on interfaith family life, I have found Henry Goldschmidt's work on multiculturalism and religion particularly useful. Goldschmidt demonstrates that multiculturalism tends to take practices that do not operate equivalently in their social systems and make them equivalent, so that, in his work, multiculturalists view Afro-Caribbean soul food and Eastern European Jewish food as things that can be shared, missing the realities of kashrut in the lives of the Hasidic community. If Goldschmidt explores the problematic nature of this multiculturalism, my work explores the ways in which interfaith families framing practices as equivalent allows them to be combined in a blended practice. If some of the original context of the practices is lost in that combination, a new context, with new implicit logics, is re-inscribed in its place.

The implications of this hybrid perspective arise most clearly in the interviews and targeted ethnographic work that I engaged in for this project. My ethnographic work was shaped by my personal relationship to interfaith family life. I am, myself, the child of an interfaith marriage, between an American-born Unitarian with some Jewish heritage and an atheist Hindu immigrant from India. Raised in the Unitarian Universalist

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[14] Anne C. Rose, *Beloved Strangers: Interfaith Families in Nineteenth Century America* (Harvard University Press, 2001).

Association, as an adult, I converted to Judaism in the Reconstructionist movement. These overlapping identities: child of an interfaith marriage, Unitarian Universalist (with a large UU family), and Jew gained me access to any number of communities, gaining their trust that I would "get" and fairly represent their stories. Similarly, my own networks of alumni associations and professional connections provided a bases for many of my interviews—connecting me more or less directly to all four of the case studies presented here. That reality speaks to broader demographics of interfaith marriages. Most interfaith couples are college-educated professionals in middle class or wealthier communities.

Drawing on these networks, I interviewed thirty families locating themselves in Jewish, Christian, or Unitarian Universalist religious communities as well as members of a community for Christian and Jewish intentionally blended families. These families thus embody different traditions and define themselves in a variety of ways. In chapter five, I explore the experiences of four of those blended families: the Brewster-Kaplan family, who has located its moral center in an alternative "back to land" ethos; the Groff family, who has become Unitarian Universalist; the Brooks-Kamper family, who are raising their daughters to be both Mormon and Jewish and who are part of both Mormon and Jewish communities; and the Katz Miller family, who are part of a community called the Interfaith Family Project, or IFFP. I chose these families in part for access—the Katz-Miller family, for instance, happened to be preparing for their son's bar mitzvah when I got in touch, but also because they spoke unusually articulately about themes touched on my many other families: connection to religious community, wrestling with contradictory truth claims, re-envisioning narratives, and negotiating questions of religious practice.

These families break down the either/or dichotomy that so often characterizes descriptions of interfaith family life, demonstrating that while being neither or both, they can create their own vibrant moral and ritual-based lives that give them strong senses of identity, though sometimes at the price of not having a religious community. My analysis contributes a new understanding of religious studies, by exploring how Americans combine multiple religious traditions in their lives. While we know that many Americans do so, scholarly studies tend to focus on individuals who, as religious seekers, take on practices that they find personally fulfilling, often from Eastern or nature-based traditions. My research both examines often taboo combinations between Christianity and Judaism and examines how those combinations are intentionally and unintentionally fused when the issue at stake is not the spiritual development of a single seeker, but rather the negotiation of the potentially competing needs of a multi-religious family.

My work adds questions rooted in religious studies generally, and American religious history in particular, to examine the ways in which interfaith families are characterized in American imaginations as well as the practices maintained by and growing out of interfaith family life. In doing this, I draw from practice theory, specifically Pierre Bourdieu's understandings of *habitus* and *dispositions*, and from Michel de Certeau's concepts of strategy and tactics, considering the ways in which practices form and shape an individual's range of dispositions.[15] I also consider the ways in which individuals consciously and unconsciously use their acts of consumption: of

[15] Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (Cambridge University Press, 1977); Pierre Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice*, 1st ed. (Stanford University Press, 1992); Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, 1st ed. (University of California Press, 2002).

services, of goods, but also of traditions as tactics to shape their family identities, sometimes against the logic of the institutions in which they locate themselves.

As a scholar, I am deeply formed by American religious history and that field grounds this work. I start from an assumption that the religious lives and realities of the interfaith families themselves are as important as the official policies of their religious organizations towards such families. At the same time, I understand that while those official statements and attitudes reflect and shape interfaith family life, so do images of blended families in popular media and the narratives that families create about themselves. While I investigate the way that my sources define religion, often in terms of formal affiliation, I draw from Gary Laderman's expanded definitions of the sacred and Robert Orsi's framing of religion as a network of relationships between, among others, the living and the dead. Scholarship on interfaith families has tended to see families that live outside of Christian or Jewish institutions as being without meaningful religious lives. For such families, however, and at times for their religiously affiliated counterparts, the theologically sanctioned points of wonder and transcendent meaning do not necessarily apply. My work uses these definitions of how religiously oriented communities and networks exist to examine the ways in which a family becomes invested in practices not traditionally understood as religious, such as transmitting family recipes. Because these experiences lie outside of the boundaries often drawn for interfaith families, they provide particularly fruitful sites for combining aspects of Christian and Jewish heritages, combinations that, in certain contexts, can gesture towards greater meaning.

The consumption of goods and experiences is central to the ways in which interfaith families define their identities; indeed, the objects of consumption (or lack thereof) as well as the location of the consumption serves as an important marker of identity. Work by scholars such as Leigh Eric Schmidt and Andrew Heinz mark the ways in which the market has long been tied up in expressions of religious identity, be they private, family practices, or public displays of piety. [16] These explorations of lived religion and consumption, however, have not explored the ways in which modes of consumption might police or trouble the lines drawn between religious distinctions and identities, as they do in interfaith families. The classic example, once again, is the celebration of Christmas. In many cases, celebrating Christmas, not necessarily with church attendance and tales of the savior's birth, but rather with a tree, stockings, presents, and viewings of *The Christmas Carol*, often marks an interfaith family as not being Jewish, or not being Jewish enough. In fact, couples often had to explicitly promise to exclude a Christmas tree from their home in order to have a Jewish wedding, rather than, for instance, promise to light Shabbat candles. While, under those circumstances, the family may attend Christmas festivities in the home of a Christian relative, and participate in all of the consumption implicit in the holiday, the special distinction preserves the interfaith couple's home as Jewish.

My dissertation explores the ramifications of these distinctions, and how it is that multicultural interfaith families transgress these very areas of taboo, recasting practices, goods, and events in order to consume across traditionally demarcated boundaries, to

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[16] Leigh Eric Schmidt, *Consumer Rites: The Buying and Selling of American Holidays* (Princeton University Press, 1997); Professor Andrew R. Heinze, *Adapting to Abundance* (Columbia University Press, 1992).

create new hybrid family practices and religious cultures. I move through eras of response to interfaith family life, moving from the late 1960s and 1970s, when religious leaders found themselves confronted with a newly rising rate of interfaith marriage to the early years of the twenty-first century, when interfaith marriage had been part of the landscape for a full generation.

Chapter one traces the policies of the Central Conference of American Rabbis, the Catholic Church, and the attitudes of the Protestant Mainline to interfaith marriage in the 1970s, as each group tried to come to terms with rapidly rising interfaith marriage rates. It establishes that the conversation was largely in terms of what was best for the families, with Jewish and Catholic leaders clear that interfaith marriage was damaging to the family and Protestant leadership ambivalent about the meaning of interreligious marriage for familial stability. It then addresses what was at stake for each of set of religious leaders, in order to demonstrate the range of objections to interfaith marriage raised by Catholics and Jews and to trace out the implications of Protestant individualism in relation to mixed marriage.

Chapter two explores portrayals of interfaith marriage in popular media, examining one text that focuses on the child and presents potential problems with being raised in an interfaith family before turning to media representations of happy interfaith love. These portrayals depict very different stakes for interfaith marriage than did the religious leadership in the previous chapter, giving less attention to issues of belief and more to questions of class, mannerisms, and ritual. In addition, it portrays interfaith marriage as a path through which Jews and sometimes Catholics can become autonomous and Americanized individuals.

Chapter three addresses attempts to create Jewish families out of interfaith marriages. Focusing on the 1980s through the early 1990s, it presents both conversations around how to achieve this goal on the part of the Reform hierarchy and advice manuals that serve as outreach to interfaith couples. The first chapter to explicitly address the deployment of the terms "religion" and "culture," this chapter examines the implications of the Reform movement's tendency to frame Judaism and Christianity as "religions" as opposed to "cultures" and ways in which the practices of interfaith families (both those explicitly understood as "religious" and those not) undermined the neat distinctions drawn by the CCAR and lay religious authority figures.

Chapter four introduces the concepts of multiculturalism and optional ethnicity as they exist in ethnic studies and traces their implications for a new multicultural model of interfaith family life, arising in the mid-1990s and continuing into the first decade of the twenty-first century. The chapter explores the ways in which multicultural interfaith families treated Christianity and Judaism as "cultural" identities whose practices and material culture could be combined at will by individual interfaith families to create new, blended interfaith identities in line with the moral logics of multiculturalism. Popular depictions of multicultural interfaith families also mark a shift from the assimilationist portrayals of the 1970s to multicultural portrayals, marking a new understanding of what it means to be American in the twenty-first century.

Chapter five introduces the heart of the theoretical model for interfaith families and details the decisions and practices of four such family units, all of whom are raising their children without explicitly choosing a Jewish or Christian identity. The first family follows a back-to-the-land lifestyle that has more Christian inflection than Jewish, but is

not dedicated to either; the second family incorporates both Jewish and Christian practices in a Unitarian Universalist setting; the fourth family participates in Jewish and Mormon communal life and explores the narratives and home practices of both traditions; and the last family is part of an intentionally Christian and Jewish interfaith community. The chapter explores the practices that the families develop and the ways in which they contextualize those practices, exploring points of continuity and discontinuity with the model of the multicultural interfaith family in chapter five, to demonstrate that while each family creates their own pastiche of practices, they have their own moral framework that roots their choices.

Ultimately, through an examination of institutional opinion, popular culture, and ethnographic studies, this dissertation aims to redefine how we think about interfaith families and their relation to American culture. Far from easily slipping into one religious tradition or another, these families—and the conversations around them—fall into a new category altogether that is, regardless of how and where the families locate themselves, inherently hybrid. The reality of traditions struggling for dominance, co-existing, and fusing, not in public space but instead within the American home is a part of a new contemporary American reality, one that seems likely to become more, rather than less, common, and one that is therefore worthy of much scholarly examination. This dissertation is a first step in the examination of this increasingly common aspect of American religious life.

Chapter One
To Stem a Rising Tide:
Interfaith Marriage and the Religious Institutions

In the files on "Intermarriage" at the American Jewish Archives, one finds a pamphlet, from 1966, produced by the General Commission on Chaplains and Armed Forces Personal and presenting Catholic, Jewish, and Protestant positions on interfaith marriage.[17] During the Cold War, the American family, understood to be rooted in both capitalism and religion, was constructed as one of the nation's strongest weapons in the battle against communism.[18] From the standpoint of the US Armed Forces, anything that might potentially weaken the family unit, then, posed a risk. In this pamphlet, entitled "What About Interfaith Marriage?" three high-ranking chaplains, a Catholic, a Jew, and a Protestant, all defined marriage across faith lines as inherently dangerous, not to the religious groups themselves, but to the strength of the marriage, and by extension, to the sanctity of the American family. The pamphlets, then, offer an entry point into the ways in which leaders in those three religions tried to navigate their responses to interfaith marriage and their own Americanness. In an era when, according to the *New York Times*, "For some years, it has seemed to many Americans narrow-minded, intolerant, almost un-American to raise objections to marriage on the basis of creed," these chaplains tried to suggest that there were in fact serious problems with interfaith marriage on multiple levels. Printed under the auspices of the American military, the pamphlet suggested the danger that interfaith marriage posed to the marital bond and therefore the American

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[17] Joseph F. Marbach, Samuel Sobel, and Fredrick W. Brink, *What About Interfaith Marriage?* (Washington, DC: The General Commission on Chaplains and Armed Forces Personnel, 1966).

[18] Elaine Tyler May, *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era*, 20 Rev Upd. (Basic Books, 2008).

home, while hinting at some of the deeper differences that this chapter will uncover.[19] The pamphlet gives some insight into the ways in which the different religious groups navigated their theological and communal objections to "mixed marriage," while at the same time balancing the concern that such disagreements could be viewed, as *The New York Times* article suggests, as "un-American."

Reform Jewish, Catholic, and mainline Protestant leadership drew from their distinct theological and social perspectives to respond to interfaith marriage. Thus, while no group strongly supported marriage across faith lines, they brought very different understandings of what was at stake for interfaith marriage. On the one hand, all agreed that the home and the family bore religious importance, particularly as it related to the raising of children. Friction came, however, as religious leaders tried to reconcile competing claims for control of the domestic sphere. The stakes for each group—Protestant, Catholic, and Jewish—were overlapping yet distinct. With an emphasis on privacy and autonomy that both informed and reflected pervasive American notions of individualism and freedom, mainline Protestants felt the least tension about intermarriage. Broadly speaking, the primacy of the individual believer had a strong history in Protestant theology and was a dominant current in twentieth century mainline Protestant thought. Both lay Jews and Catholics as well as their religious leaders, however, were forced to negotiate between the traditional claims of their own religious communities and American cultural norms of family privacy and individual rights with which those traditions were sometimes out of step.

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[19] Dorothy Barclay, "Mixed Religion Marriage Called Difficult to Sustain," *New York Times* (New York, April 2, 1957).

As they did so, the only thing that remained permanent was the steady hum of disagreement surrounding the issue. For Reform Jews, the issue was one that had been present since they first came to America: How to preserve a Jewish community and generational continuity in a world in which Jewishness may be easily shed—a process historically facilitated by intermarriage—while at the same time working within the highly universalizing language of mid-twentieth century American Reform Judaism. While their responses moved through several permutations, ultimately the inclusion of intermarried families in synagogue life and the purity of a Jewish home crystallized as issues of primary importance. For Catholics, the problem was also old, but different: How to reconcile a strong theological view in the church as an authoritative mediator between God and individuals—via the sacraments—with an American individualism. These concerns touched both on the sacramental nature of marriage and the necessity of bringing up the children of intermarriage in the Church. Additionally, both Jewish and Catholic hierarchies shared the problem of how to discuss their concerns with intermarriage, so often in tension with their goal of being accepted as American religions. At the same time, institutional leaders also had to come to terms with the fact that they desired more institutional reach into the homes and family lives of American Catholics and Jews than their congregants necessarily wanted to give them.

This chapter will address how the institutional discussions about "mixed marriage" or "intermarriage" evolved in the mid-twentieth century trifecta of religion in America: Protestant, Catholic, and Jew—Reform Judaism, Catholicism, and mainline Protestantism. By examining the convergences and divergences inherent within the conversations of the Reform movement of American Judaism, the Catholic Church, and

mainline Protestantism, we will see how each arm of organized religion attempted to stake a claim to its place within the American landscape, while at the same time defending the particular nature of their communities. In the process of these varying discourses, the encounter between institutional understanding and lived religious practice begins to emerge; indeed, it is this very engagement that will serve as the purview of the following chapters. Ultimately, the conversations surrounding interfaith couples from within the institutional leadership of Reform Judaism, Catholicism, and mainline Protestantism both establish the stakes at hand for each group while at the same time reveal a far more complex set of assumptions—and contradictions—buried just beneath the surface of the rhetoric.

Both Reform Jews and Catholics had extensive internal conversations about how to address the rising intermarriage rate. While both groups began with strong statements against intermarriage, they also needed to accommodate congregations and parishioners who were going to intermarry, with or without clerical support. The institutional structures of American Judaism and American Catholicism were, however, distinctly different, as were their histories and social positions in the United States, and therefore so were their responses. If the Reform movement moved from debating whether rabbis should be allowed to perform interfaith marriages to debating how best to encourage interfaith families to join and participate in Jewish communal and home life, the post–Vatican II Catholic Church was most concerned with the sacramental nature of Catholic marriage and policing its bounds while maintaining positive relationships with American Protestant society.

To Officiate or Not to Officiate: The Central Conference of American Rabbis, the Union of American Hebrew Congregations, and the Implications of Officiating at Interfaith Weddings

In the Reform movement, the immediate question was not how to cope with interfaith marriage, but how to prevent it. Samuel Sobel was the Executive Secretary of the Armed Forces Chaplains board when he contributed the Jewish section of the military pamphlet on interfaith marriage. In this context, his task was, in part, to stake out a firm stance against mixed marriage without suggesting that his stance indicated either Jewish racial identity or in any other way detracted from Jewish "Americanness." In an attempt to deflect critiques that Jews should not intermarry because they held themselves apart from the rest of America, he explained that Jewish objections to interfaith marriage did not "arise from a sense of Jewish superiority or exclusiveness."[20] Rather, he argued, "[o]ne has not gotten to the heart of Judaism and the concept of Jewish peoplehood unless he grasps the great ethical principle of the home."[21] Sobel focused on the Judaism of the home, specifically arguing that "[h]usband and wife together, united for life, bring the spirit of God, the spirit of holiness, into the household." The home, he argued, was more central to Jewish identity than any institution or organization, including the synagogue. Interfaith marriage, then, was a problem for the Jewish community because it undermined the potential sacrality of the home—in intermarriage, he argued, the home would be "divided against itself," and its essential Jewishness seriously depleted. Sobel was careful to explain that a "stranger" might enter Judaism through conversion, as did the biblical Ruth. Otherwise, marriage between Jews and non-Jews was discouraged

[20] Marbach, Sobel, and Brink, *What About Interfaith Marriage?*.
[21] Ibid.

because the absence of religion in the home or the presence of competing religions in the home were seen as, "not conductive to the peace and harmony, love and understanding, which God has designed for marriage and which the intimate, sacred relationship of marriage must foster." While Sobel presented his concerns with interfaith marriage as particularly Jewish, because he was talking about protecting the home for a place of religious development and sanctuary, there was little in his argument that could not, potentially, be extrapolated to other religious communities. Additionally, by framing his argument in terms of what made for a healthy home, he deflected objections to the exclusive nature of endogamous marriage.

Sobel's comments were part of a larger trend in liberal Judaism that sought to define and preserve a Jewish tradition perceived to be under threat from various internal and external forces. At the same time, in the 1970s, while the Reform movement struggled with the dramatic increase in the interfaith marriage rate, it also attempted to form a response that would manage to strongly oppose interfaith marriage without either alienating the broader American public or the rising numbers of intermarried Jews. While there were questions about how to incorporate families of interfaith couples into synagogue life, those questions gained more widespread in attention in the 1980s and 90s. In the 1970s, Jews focused simply on the phenomenon of mixed marriages[22]: what to call them, whether rabbis should perform interfaith marriages or rather demand that the

[22] A note on terminology: at this phase in religious life, both Catholic and Jewish traditions referred to marriages between members of two different religious traditions as mixed marriages rather than interfaith marriages. Indeed, at this stage, the Reform movement distinguished between mixed marriages, occurring between Jews and non-Jews, and interfaith marriages, between ethnic Jews and converted Jews.

non-Jewish spouse convert, and what the status of the children of intermarriage would be in synagogue life.

Throughout the 1960s and 1970s, the Central Conference of American Rabbis (CCAR), the Rabbinical Branch of the Reform movement, maintained the policy toward interfaith marriage laid out in a 1947 Responsum, which clearly opposed interfaith marriage.[23] In the 1940s, when the intermarriage rate was below 7%, this position did not create much comment. [24] Throughout the 1960s and 1970s, however, demand for rabbis to perform interfaith marriages rose dramatically, causing tension within the Reform Movement and in the Jewish community more broadly. For instance, in 1973, a resolution was introduced to the New York Board of Rabbis, a committee made up of representatives from the Reform, Conservative, and Orthodox movements, which denied membership to any rabbis who performed mixed marriages.[25]

Reform rabbi Henry Essrig responded to this resolution by writing to the chairman of the Ethics Committee of the CCAR, requesting ethics charges be brought against the three rabbis who had sponsored the bill. While Essrig considered interfaith marriage a violation of "the most sacred elements of the Jewish tradition," he simultaneously defended the CCAR's right to make its own decisions about the practice of its rabbis, rather than holding them accountable to other movements. [26] He pointed out the other movements were "meddling" in what was a very contentious moment for

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[23] In Judaism, Responsa are legal opinions on specific contemporary questions, drawing from the authors' interpretations of previous iterations of Jewish law. Each movement of Judaism has produced (and continues to produce) its own response.
[24] Fred Massarik, *National Jewish Population Study: Intermarriage, Facts for Planning* (New York: Council of Jewish Federations and Welfare Funds, 1971), 10.
[25] Harry Essrig, "Letter to Rabbi Jacob Shankman, Chair Ethics Committee CCAR", February 28, 1973, 1, SC-1695, American Jewish Archives.
[26] Ibid.

Reform Judaism. Internal Jewish debates about how to address rising rates of intermarriage, then, were closely tied to debates about the relationship between the different Jewish movements. By the 1960s and early 1970s, more and more Reform rabbis were allowing interfaith marriage without conversion, and debate within the Reform movement had reached a fevered pitch, as had responses from other Jewish leaders about the Reform approach.

At the 1971 national conference of the CCAR, the question of whether to officiate at interfaith weddings took center stage in the debates of the Reform rabbinate. Roland Gittleson and David Polish proposed a resolution declaring that "mixed marriages are contrary to the tradition of the Jewish religion" and calling on "its members not to officiate at such mixed marriage ceremonies."[27] This was a shift in language from the earlier resolution, passed in 1909 and reaffirmed in 1947, which stipulated that mixed marriage was "contrary to the tradition of the Jewish religion, and should therefore be discouraged by the rabbinate." The change in language here is slight, but significant. While the Reform movement had always disapproved of what it called mixed marriage, prior to 1971, rabbis could use whatever methods they felt appropriate to discourage the marriages and then, if they felt that performing the marriage was the best course of action in order to keep the couple in the Jewish fold, were permitted to do so. In short, while the 1947 Responsum condemned interfaith marriage, it allowed rabbis to officiate if, for some reason, the individual rabbi thought that choice was best. The Gittleson-Polish amendment attempted to take away that bit of rabbinic autonomy. Specifically, supporters of the amendment believed that rabbis should not perform interfaith marriages.

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[27] Murray Blackman, David Max Eichhorn, and et al., "An Open Letter to the CCAR", April 25, 1973, SC-1699, American Jewish Archives.

For some, the reason was strategic. They believed that to perform the marriage was to give tacit approval to interfaith marriages. Additionally, many hoped that if they could not persuade Jews to date other Jews, they could convince non-Jewish significant others to convert, using the incentive of a Jewish wedding and therefore guaranteeing a Jewish home. For others, the issue was rooted in understandings of the definition of Jewish marriage. Because of the covenantal nature of Jewish marriage, a religiously valid/legal marriage could not occur between a Jew and a non-Jew. Therefore, the question of officiating at such a union became irrelevant.

The Gittleson-Polish amendment would have forbidden Reform rabbis from performing interfaith marriage outright—a distinct tightening of the regulations. These restrictions were met with swift resistance. The 1971 proposal was to be finalized at the annual conference the following year, but in April of 1972, sixteen rabbis condoned a new position, issuing a statement advocating for a return to the original position. They pointed out that polls from 1962 demonstrated that the CCAR supported the 1909 resolution "almost unanimously."[28] Further, they argued that "there is such a great diversity of individual opinions and practices in the Conference with regard to the professional implication of the intent of this resolution that no CCAR member may rightly claim that his opinion or his practices represent those of a clear majority of the conference membership."[29] As a result of the range of opinions within the CCAR membership, the sponsoring rabbis argued that the original statements should stand, since limiting or defining rabbinic practice would "serve no meaningful purpose and may well

[28] Ibid.
[29] Ibid.

cause a serious breach both within the Conference and the American Reform movement."[30]

Opposition to the blanket ban of the Gittleson-Polish amendment reflected a desire for institutional and communal harmony far more than for a consistent theological stance. The majority of CCAR members believed that rabbinic autonomy was more important than an utterly constant policy towards rabbinic officiation at interfaith marriages. Indeed, that view ultimately prevailed, and the CCAR passed a resolution that strongly opposed rabbinic officiation at interfaith marriages but preserved the right of individual rabbis to disagree and officiate without losing their professional standing. Other rabbis opposed the Gittleson-Polish amendment because they believed that such a declaration was not in the best interests of *klal yisrael*, or the entirety of the Jewish people.

These rabbis suggested, rather, that it was best for the Jewish people for rabbis to be allowed to officiate at interfaith marriages. Specifically, they followed an argument that Hillel director, Chair of the CCAR Committee on the Unaffiliated, and author Rabbi David Max Eichhorn made, in a 1957 article for the *CCAR Journal* that was recirculated in 1971.[31] While Eichhorn was not in favor of interfaith marriage, he did not believe that refusing to marry such a couple would prevent the wedding. Someone else would simply perform it, on someone else's terms. He argued that a couple who came to a rabbi for an

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[30] Ibid.

[31] Eichhorn was chair of the Committee on the Unaffiliated, appointed by the CCAR to explore the idea of outreach not to non-Jewish spouses in interfaith marriages but to unchurched and unbaptized Americans who might be in need of a religion.
Lila Corwin Berman, "Mission to America: The Reform Movement's Missionary Experiments, 1919-1960," *Religion and American Culture* 13, no. 2 (Sum 2003): 205–239.

interfaith marriage and was turned away would likely be "bewildered, frustrated, and resentful" rather than understanding the rabbi's position.[32] They would cease to regard the rabbi as a "credible religious teacher." As a result, Eichhorn believed that turning away interfaith couples would result in more alienated Jewish spouses, fewer non-Jewish spouses converting to Judaism, fewer Jewish homes, and fewer children being raised as Jews.[33] According to Eichhorn, the rabbi had two responsibilities when presented with an interfaith couple: "to move in a direction that will not weaken but will possibly strengthen the Jewish religion and also to move in a direction which will increase the chances for happiness of this couple as individuals and as the establishers of a home and family."[34] In his view, by performing the marriage, the officiating rabbi continued to have influence in the life of the interfaith couple and became a positive, rather than an alienating, Jewish presence in their lives.

Eichhorn also tackled terminology in the name of *klal yisrael*, arguing for a switch from "mixed marriage" to "interfaith marriage." While the terms could be understood as synonymous, many people found the phrase "mixed marriage" to be offensive because of how often it was spoken of negatively and denoted people with a second-class status within Reform communities. Previously, in Jewish circles, the term "interfaith" marriage had been used to refer to marriages in which one partner had converted to Judaism. Eichhorn argues that, because of the conversion, these marriages are "in every respect, Jewish marriage[s]." Therefore, the distinction being made between mixed marriages and interfaith marriages was a false distinction, and there was

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[32] David Max Eichhorn, "Letter to the Reform Rabbinate", November 22, 1971, 5, Intermarriage Nearprint Box 4, American Jewish Archive.
[33] Ibid., 5.
[34] Ibid.

no reason not to replace the offensive "mixed marriage" with what he saw as the more neutral "interfaith marriage."

While Eichhorn was an advocate for rabbinic officiation at interfaith marriages, his support was contingent upon his definition of Jewish continuity. He would therefore advocate for interfaith marriage only under certain conditions. He did not require the non-Jewish spouse to convert, and in fact, if there was to be conversion, he insisted that it take place after the marriage so as to ensure that a future spouse was converting for love of the faith and the Jewish people rather than under coercion in order to have an officiant or out of love for the other partner. He did, however, require the couple to promise, "word of honor, that they will (1) rear their children as Jews; (2) give their children a formal Jewish religious school education; (3) make the home religious atmosphere conform to the teachings of the Jewish religious school that their children attend; (4) have no non-Jewish religious symbols or celebrations of any kind in the home."[35] With this list of requirements, Eichhorn hoped to naturally bring about the conversion of the non-Jewish spouse and to give the children a solid Jewish upbringing, securing their sense of themselves as Jewish. In rationalizing his decision, Eichhorn explained that the real concern in interfaith marriages was not the marriage itself. While religiously homogeneous marriages were preferable, he argued, no "reputable sociological study" proved that interfaith marriages had higher divorce rates. The potential casualties of interfaith marriage were not the couple, then, but their children: "There seems to be quite general agreement among psychologists that the major psychic damage which such marriages may cause does not fall on the husband and wife but upon their children. If the

[35] Ibid., 5

children of mixed marriages are not given a solid orientation in and a strong attachment to just one religion, these children are very likely to come to adulthood as insecure, unsteady, mixed-up individuals, whose lack of inner religious strength and stability will manifest itself in a thousand and one anti-social ways."[36]

Eichhorn framed his concern in terms of what was best for the children, rather than in terms of the impact on the Jewish community should these children fail to become Jewish. The concern for the children would echo through advice to interfaith families in subsequent decades, as will be explored in chapter three. In a context in which Reform leaders were deeply concerned about the impact of interfaith marriage on Jewish continuity and about the position of Jews in American society, concern for the children provided a socially acceptable way to encourage exclusively Jewish education and home environments for children of mixed marriage. Thus, the argument of "what is best for the child" veiled an ulterior motive: the continuity and strength of the descendants of the "baby-boom" generation, whose ties with normative Judaism were weakening rather than building off of their parents' commitment.

The most important aspect of this issue, on both sides of the debate, was the question of what was best for the Jewish community. Was it best to refuse to marry interfaith couples because such a refusal best served Judaism, sending a strong message that interfaith marriage is not acceptable, as interpretations of Jewish marriage law did not allow rabbinic officiation? Some even argued that it was better for Judaism to have fewer, but more committed, people. Was it best to bless interfaith unions because then a rabbi could encourage the couple to become members of the community, requiring them

[36] Ibid., 2–3.

to promise to raise their children in Jewish homes, without elements of Christian religious tradition? Either way, the needs or wishes of the couple were not of primary importance; the needs of the Jewish community outweighed any particular familial desire or circumstance. Eichhorn's comment that "no reputable sociological study" demonstrated that interfaith marriages were inclined to failure pointed to a widely held belief in 1970s America that interfaith marriages were dramatically more difficult and therefore more prone to failure than religiously homogenous marriages. Again, as Eichhorn and others argued, the failure to provide children with a consistent religious message would harm them. Because interfaith marriages were believed to be difficult as well as damaging to children, the Reform leadership was able to conclude it was best, for the couples, for their potential children, and for survival of Judaism, to dissuade such couples from marrying.

Individual couples, however, did not experience the refusal of rabbis to perform their weddings as in their best interests, and some of Eichhorn's predictions about their responses proved true. In 1979, Alexander Schindler, President of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations, which is the congregational arm of the Reform Movement, called for the creation of a Reform agency, the Jewish Outreach Institute, that would address the problem of intermarriage. "The tide of intermarriage is running against us," he argued. The intent of the agency was "to turn the tide which threatens to sweep us away into directions which might enable us to recover our numbers and, more important, to recharge our inner strength."[37] While the agency was to be multifaceted, one of its primary functions would be outreach to intermarried couples.

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[37] Alexander Schindler, "Address of Rabbi Alexander M. Schindler, President Union of American Hebrew Congregations to the Board of Trustees" (Houston, TX, December 2,

Interfaith couples had often felt unwelcome in synagogues, which failed at explaining Judaism to the non-Jewish partner. In addition, both members of the partnership were framed as a threat to Jewish continuity and community. This "outreach," then, was intended to make interfaith couples feel welcome in synagogue life. While Schindler opposed rabbinic officiation at interfaith marriages, he cautioned that the rabbi who refused to marry a couple need not turn them away from Judaism. Rather, Schindler suggested that a rabbi explain why he could not officiate at interfaith marriages and emphasize that the couple and their future children were welcome in the synagogue. In order to keep interfaith couples within the Jewish fold, he admonished that the Reform movement "must remove the 'not wanted' signs from our hearts. We are opposed to intermarriage, but we must not oppose the intermarried."[38] Rabbis and congregants were encouraged to disapprove of intermarriage and prevent it if possible. Only when that failed was the Jewish community encouraged to make intermarried couples comfortable and welcome in their communities. These mixed messages thus created a situation in which many interfaith families felt neither welcomed nor encouraged by the institutional hierarchy. At best, they were tolerated, but only on somewhat begrudging terms.

Schindler proposed three radical steps to change this scenario and welcome intermarried families into Reform congregations. He also dealt with converts, interfaith couples, and the children of interfaith families. First, Schindler proposed a new approach to converts to Judaism. He suggested that, since the best outcome for an interfaith couple was for the non-Jewish partner to convert, Jews needed to shift their attitude towards

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1978), 83, Alexander M. Schindler Papers 630, Box 11, Folder 11, American Jewish Archives.

[38] Ibid., 87.

converts. Too often, he explained, "born Jews" assumed that "since only a madman would choose to be a Jew, the convert is either neurotic or hypocritical."[39] As a result, converts to Judaism existed as second-class citizens, considered to be less Jewish than "born Jews," a situation that needed to be rectified. Though not all converts became Jewish because of marriage to a Jew, in his role as Chair of the Committee on the Unaffiliated, Eichhorn conducted a study in the early 1950s that found that a full 93.9 % of Reform conversions were in conjunction with marriage to a Jew.[40]

As a result, the Reform leadership addressed negative attitudes towards converts largely in the context of interfaith marriage, as part of an attempt to make conversion an appealing option. The ramifications of a focus on conversion are more fully explored in chapter three. In hoping for the conversion of non-Jewish partners, Schindler made it clear that he was not considering "stealing" believers from other respected religions (i.e., the Catholic Church or mainline Protestantism). Rather, he was interested in the unchurched spiritual seekers, to whom, he argued, Judaism could offer universal truths. This framing of Judaism in terms of a "universal religion," common in the Reform movement particularly in the early to mid-twentieth century, would have profound

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[39] Ibid., 85.
Schindler wrote this in the 1970s, at a time when, because of both the Holocaust and the 1967 war, Jews, including American Jews, believed themselves to be constantly under threat of extinction, not just from intermarriage, but from external forces as well. To take on a Jewish identity, then, could be seen as deciding to take on the potential of that threat. For theologies addressing this aspect of Jewish thought, see the work of Richard Rudenstein, Irving Greenberg, and Emil Fachenheim.

[40] Berman, "Mission to America," 220.
Berman's article considers the missionary impulses of the Reform movement in the early to mid-twentieth century, offering a useful perspective of how porous some members of the CCAR considered the line between Jew and non-Jew.

implications for the larger conversations about how to address the growing presence of interfaith families.

Secondly, Schindler charged the outreach agency with finding ways to include non-Jewish partners in communal Jewish life. He controversially argued that the "halachah permits non-Jews to be in the synagogue, to sing in the choir, to recite the blessing over the Sabbath and festival candles, and even to handle the Torah. There is no law which forbids the non-Jew to be buried in a Jewish cemetery."[41] Schindler's claims for the role of a non-Jewish spouse were shocking, flying in the face of conventionally held boundaries between Jew and non-Jew. By including non-Jewish partners as fully as possible in Jewish life, however, Schindler hoped that they themselves would initiate processes of conversion and be comfortable raising their children to identify as Jews.

Schindler's final concern dealt with raising children as Jews. He argued that including children of patrilineal descent in the Jewish community was central to an outreach mission—a position that foreshadowed the movement's inclusion of children of patrilineal descent four years later. He pushed for including all children of interfaith marriage in Jewish ritual, regardless of whether or not the mother was the Jewish parent, making the child technically Jewish according to traditional Jewish law. The Reform movement had long before discarded a traditional relationship with the law, and Schindler saw no reason to use traditional definitions of "who is a Jew" if they ran counter to contemporary needs. It would be off-putting, he argued, to require that the child of a Jewish father convert in order to have a bar mitzvah, especially if the parents had raised the child exclusively as a Jew.

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[41] Schindler, "Address of Rabbi Alexander M. Schindler, President Union of American Hebrew Congregations to the Board of Trustees," 87.

The concern, for the upper echelons of the CCAR and the UAHC, ultimately centered on how the children of interfaith marriages would fare, both in terms of their psychological health and their commitment to the Jewish people. Other than the decisions to grant all the children of non-Jewish mothers full participation in synagogue life, there was little conversation about how to interact with children from interfaith homes themselves. While ultimately, as chapter four will explore, the Reform movement focused its conversations on how to encourage interfaith families to create Jewish homes, for most of the 1970s, conversations within the CCAR and the UAHC focused on the prevention of interfaith marriages rather than on the needs of such families. Similarly, they discussed the need to include these blended families, but paid little attention to how to implement such plans.

The framing of the question of children's futures in psychological terms made these conversations more acceptable to a broader American public. If correspondence within the Reform hierarchy addressed the best outcome for the Jewish community, their public statements reflected the question of how best to care for and raise healthy children. Rabbis and other Jewish leaders were able to argue that science, in the form of psychology, supported the position that a singular religious identity was best for children. They encouraged couples in which one person had a Jewish identity and the other person was a largely secular American, adrift from other religious communities or perhaps seeking a religious identity, to find a home in Judaism. This required using a reconfigured understanding of Judaism as a universal religion rather than an ethnic identity, both making the synagogue more accessible to the intermarried spouse and unintentionally undercutting some of the traditional arguments against intermarriage.

The Catholic Church and the Sacrament of Marriage

If Jews were concerned about marriages between Jews and Christians, Catholics were predominantly concerned with marriages to Protestants, a position that was largely shaped by an anti-Protestant stance that reflected a pre-Vatican II sensibility. At the same time, that sensibility needed to be articulated in a manner that was palatable to an American public that had only recently recognized Catholicism as a viable American religion, provided they played by certain rules.[42] Specifically, as had been shown in the presidential campaign of John F. Kennedy, American Catholics needed to demonstrate to the rest of the American public that their primary allegiance was with the United States, rather than with Rome. In the military pamphlet on interfaith marriage with which this chapter opened, the spokesman for Catholicism, Monsignor Joseph Marbach, Chancellor of the Military Ordinariate, found himself expressing a concern for interfaith marriage that had been formed by Catholic theology in a language that was palatable to the American public. Like his Jewish colleague, he began by expressing concern that mixed marriage would lead to marital unhappiness and therefore recommended avoiding marriage across faiths. If, however, a couple insisted on such a marriage, he suggested a negotiation of their differing backgrounds that was based on the shared worship space of a military setting, presumed a Protestant/Catholic marriage, and applied a logic that ultimately favored Catholic practice.

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[42] Will Herberg, *Protestant, Catholic, Jew: An Essay in American Religious Sociology* (Anchor Books, 1960); Jay P. Dolan, *In Search of an American Catholicism: A History of Religion and Culture in Tension*, Trade. (Oxford University Press, USA, 2003), 127–260; Charles Morris, *American Catholic: The Saints and Sinners Who Built America's Most Powerful Church* (Vintage, 1998), 196–227.

Using the logic of psychology over theology, Marbach wrote that the Catholic Church did not favor mixed marriages, because the different religious backgrounds would add stress to the marriage. "To paraphrase a well-known columnist," he quipped, "marriage is a war enough without making it a holy war."[43] In this sentiment, he echoed the concern of his Jewish co-author, who commented that intermarriage caused a house "divided against itself." He moved on, however, to suggest that while successful interfaith marriages are possible, they are likely only when couples can agree on certain ground rules, which he describes through the metaphor of shared worship space. He argued that a couple could compromise on their family life just as congregations could compromise on decorations for worship space. Just as Catholics might agree not to display a picture of the Blessed Mother, as long as Protestants allowed a depiction of the Holy Family, similar compromises, he argued, must be made in a marriage, and must be made in a way that at least considers the views of the party that wants "more." After all, he pointed out, if Protestants have three sacraments and Catholics seven, a child raised as a Catholic will believe in all of the sacraments held dear by a Protestant parent.

Marbach's comments reflected a Catholic Church of the 1960s and 1970s that was actively renegotiating their stance on mixed marriage under the watchful eyes of Protestants eager to spot attitudes towards intermarriage that seemed to threaten the ecumenical spirit of the age. At the same time, like their Jewish counterparts, mixed marriage presented some very serious practical and theological problems for the Catholic hierarchy. In the 1960s, the American Catholic Church's guidelines for mixed marriages shifted slightly as a result of the changes that came with Vatican II. In order to grasp the

[43] Marbach, Sobel, and Brink, *What About Interfaith Marriage?*.

Catholic Church's understandings of marriage and responses to mixed marriage, one must first be familiar with the Catholic Church's theological understandings of the Sacrament of Marriage.

While a thorough study of the formal theology of marriage and concerns of the Catholic hierarchy towards mixed marriage in the decades immediately preceding Vatican II fall beyond the purview of this project, they grounded the Catholic Church's theological concerns around mixed marriage.[44] The Catholic Church regarded itself as the sole authority over all Christian marriages, to the extent "that it makes marriage more a contractual pledge binding the two persons to the Catholic Church than a free, mutual, and inviolable contract between each other."[45] Given that legalistic understanding, in which each party in the marriage entered into a contract with the Church, it prohibited marriages between Catholics and non-Catholics, whether the non-Catholics were baptized Christians or not.[46] In fact, before the Second Vatican Council, Catholic literature drew on traditional Church history to demonstrate a particularly grave concern with marriage to Protestants, who were often referred to as heretics or schismatics.[47] In 1932, the American bishops instituted a policy that before a priest performed a mixed marriage, the

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[44] Before Vatican II, priests and devout Catholics were also concerned about specific practices that varied between Catholics and Protestants: for instance, Catholic leaders feared that if a Catholic man married a Protestant women, she would serve him meat on Fridays or that a Protestant man would insist that his wife feed him meat on Friday night and would not support her in making the children join her in fish (or, worse yet, would forbid her to cook fish). Because Vatican II eliminated many of the differences in mandated practice between Catholics and Protestants, by the late 1960s, Catholic leaders raised fewer practice-based objections to mixed marriage.

[45] L.H. Lehmann, *Mixed Marriages in the Catholic Church* (New York: Agora Publishing Co, 1941), 1.

[46] Abbot Richard Felix, "Why: Mixed Marriages," *Our Faith Press*, n.d. (but prior to 1956.

[47] Ibid. Lehmann, *Mixed Marriages in the Catholic Church*, 1.

Catholic partner had to meet with the priest alone. The bishops believed, in the words of John Francis Noll, Bishop of Fort Wayne, Indiana, that "most mixed marriages could be prevented if the priest had a friendly chat with the Catholic party before he or she promised too much, or at least the dangers which we fear from every mixed marriage could, in large part, be overcome."[48] Once again, Catholic and Jewish understandings of the role of the clergy in these marriages intersected; their first priority was prevention. If prevention failed, however, the question was how to minimize the damage, both to the couple and to the religious community.

In the event that the priest could not convince the Catholic to break the engagement, the couple and their priest were required to seek a dispensation from Rome for the marriage, as mixed marriage violated Church laws.[49] Dispensations could only be granted under specific reasons, the majority of which centered on securing Catholics for the Church. The Church would grant dispensations under the following conditions: the priest truly believed that the Catholic in the couple would, if not granted a dispensation, commit apostasy by being married in either a civil or a Protestant ceremony; the priest had a "well-founded hope" that the Protestant partner would be converted to Catholicism through the marriage along with his or her family, including any children from a prior marriage; the Catholic lived in a place in which there were few other Catholics and to deny marriage to a Protestant might prevent the Catholic from marrying; the marriage would prevent a scandal, for instance, an illegitimate pregnancy or cohabitation.[50]

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[48] John Francis Noll, "The New Law Relating to Mixed Marriage", 1932, PNOL Box 1 Folder 034, The Archives of the University of Notre Dame.
[49] Lehmann, *Mixed Marriages in the Catholic Church*, 6–8.
[50] Ibid.

Here, then, the concern shifts from questions of personal faith to those of communal continuity. In order to be eligible for a dispensation, the couple had to make a specific set of promises, and the Catholic party had to make an additional pledge. Together, the couple had to promise that they would not divorce; that all children born to the marriage would be educated and baptized exclusively as Catholics, that the non-Catholic would not interfere with raising the children as Catholics and that if the Catholic partner died, he or she would continue to raise the children as Catholics, that the Archbishop or his representatives had the right to enforce the contract, and lastly that all of the above conditions be transferable to their heirs. Additionally, the Catholic party promised to work faithfully for the conversion of his or her spouse, to refrain from practicing birth control, and to have only one marriage, before a priest.[51]

The requirements for a dispensation and the agreements required from the couple are noteworthy for a number of reasons. First, they demonstrate a concern with the creation of new Catholics, through both the potential conversion of the Protestant and his or her premarital family and through the guarantee that all future children would be raised as Catholics. Secondly, however, the language of the ante-nuptial agreement was legal language, referring to the marrying couples as "parties" and using the nomenclature of contract law. In the 1940s, the American Catholic Church was particularly interested in whether these contracts could be upheld in the American civil courts.[52] Without the support of the civil courts, the Church could only enforce the contracts as long as the family stayed in relationship to the Church. If the family left the Church, which was

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[51] Lehmann, *Mixed Marriages in the Catholic Church*.
[52] As chapter three will demonstrate, forty years later, in the 1980s, the Reform movement explored similar questions, with similar concerns and results.

precisely what the contract hoped to prevent, the Church had no way to retaliate. If the contracts could have been upheld in a civil court, then the Church would have been able to declare marriages null if the couple did not fulfill their agreements and potentially take custody of the children, to guarantee their Catholic upbringing.

After these concerns were raised in *American Catholic Magazine*, *The Yale Law Journal* took up the question of "Whether these completely un-American pre-marital contracts as drawn up by the Catholic Church on instructions from Rome could be upheld and enforced by the civil courts in American, and, if so would it be advisable to do so."[53] Ultimately, *The Yale Law Journal* decided that the contract was legally binding and therefore could, theoretically, be upheld in a US civil court. According to the 1941 pamphlet, "Mixed Marriage and the Catholic Church," however, "in the opinion of the article in the Yale Law Journal: to force an issue that concerns a difference of religious opinion in to a decision of the civil courts is not in keeping with our vital democratic principle of separation of church and state."[54] In the face of fears about the impact of Catholic laws on American jurisprudence, the American Catholic hierarchy chose not to pursue support from civil courts for maintaining the Catholic nature of interfaith homes, at least in part because of the implication that to do so was un-American. For a Catholic church that sought to affirm its mainstream acceptance, such legal challenges posed too many risks to be useful.

Given that the Catholic objections to mixed marriage applied to all non-Catholics, it is worth thinking for a moment about why their objections focused on Protestants rather than on Jews. On the surface, one might think that a Catholic/Protestant marriage would

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[53] Lehmann, *Mixed Marriages in the Catholic Church*, 8.
[54] Ibid.

be (if religiously mixed marriages were going to occur), the best kind of mixed marriage, far better than one between a Catholic and a Jew, Jews being the third leg in the American religious tripod. Notably, the Catholic Church was not overly concerned with Catholic/Jewish intermarriage. Primarily, the Catholic concern with Protestants was simply a numbers game. Statistically, the Church's American hierarchy believed that one in four Catholics married a non-Catholic, and the majority of those marriages were to Protestants. Protestants, then, who also represented the mainstream in American culture, posed a particular threat to the church. Secondly, Protestant clergy were often more willing to perform interfaith marriage than were Jewish clergy, and so the Catholic hierarchy felt united with Jewish leadership on an issue that remained contentious with Protestant leaders.

The Church had particular theological concerns with marriage between Catholics and Protestants. Catholic theology considers marriage a Sacrament of the Life, which means that it can only be undertaken when one is free from sin. Additionally, the Sacrament of Marriage is only a sacrament if both of the people being married are in a state of grace. If one or both of the people is in a sinful state, then the marriage is a life-long contract, but not a sacrament. While it would be theoretically possible for a baptized non-Catholic to be in a sin-free state, as an article by Abbot Richard Felix pointed out, "the well informed Catholic will ask himself the question 'Is the Sacrament received worthily?'"[55] While a Catholic prepared for marriage by going to confession, the non-Catholic could not and therefore was more likely to be married in a state of

[55] Felix, "Why: Mixed Marriages."

"moral or grievous sin," rendering the marriage valid but "sinful and sacrilegious."[56] Again, Church literature, such as the *Our Sunday Visitor* column "Why" on the subject of "Mixed Marriage," was careful to point out that it was perfectly possible for a Catholic to marry in a sinful state, but the fact remained that Catholics, unlike Protestants or Jews, had a way to cleanse themselves of sin.

Lastly, the ecumenical movement gave Catholics considerable reason for concern. As Catholics and Protestants found increased common ground in social justice arenas and carried on increased conversations together as American Christians, the Catholic laity became increasingly less concerned with divisions between the Catholic Church and Protestant denominations, particularly High Church denominations such as Lutherans and Episcopalians. As a result, the Church tried to couch its objections to mixed marriage in acceptable language, claiming, "It cannot be stressed too emphatically that the Church in her legislation on mixed marriages intends no offence whatsoever to anyone. On the contrary, she is vitally concerned about the happiness of both parties to a marriage, and seeks through her laws to safeguard conjugal happiness for all."[57] The objections and requirements, nevertheless, did not sit well with mainline Protestant denominations. As ecumenicism took root, liberal Protestants became more and more interested in creating ties across Christianity and therefore came to object less to marriage with Catholics. In part because of this disapproval, Protestant clergy were often willing to perform mixed marriages. As a result, Protestants posed a problem to the Catholic hierarchy that the Jews did not. Perhaps the Catholic hierarchy did not need to express deep concern about marriages between Catholics and Jews because the Catholic bishops could rest assured

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[56] Ibid.
[57] Ibid.

that if priests refused to marry Catholic/Jewish couples, rabbis would do so as well (or at least the governing bodies of the Jewish movements strongly encouraged rabbis to do so). Since they shared similar fears of assimilation and decreased relevance, their positions on interfaith marriage reflected those concerns. Institutionally, Catholics and Jews thus presented a united front on the subject of mixed marriage.

Vatican II shifted many arenas of the Church; consequently, it opened up questions on mixed marriage. While discussion on mixed marriage was raised in 1963, in 1964 the Council decided to put the question before the Pope for his consideration. In 1966, Pope Paul VI issued an Apostolic Letter, "*Motu Proprio* Determining Norms for Mixed Marriages," which was, in turn, released in English by the National Conference of Catholic Bishops.[58] The papal letter signified a distinct shift in attitudes towards mixed marriage at the same time that it condemned the practice. In the letter, the Pope observed that the contemporary world, in which Catholics were living in closer proximity to Protestants and other non-Catholics, made the question of mixed marriage more pressing than it had been in the past. The apostolic letter rebutted the somewhat popular idea that mixed marriage might bring about greater Christian unity through the conversion of Protestants. Rather, Pope Paul VI feared that disagreements within and about mixed marriage would increase tension between Protestants and Catholics.[59] Additionally, he

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[58] This letter was in part the product of a Synod of Catholic Bishops, which occurred in 1967 to discuss the problem of mixed marriage. The conference was international in scope, demonstrating that for the Church, mixed marriage was a problem in North America and in much of secularized Europe, as Catholics and Protestants came into increased contact with each other and were less likely to find themselves interacting across a deep theological and practice-based divide.

[59] Paul Vi, "An Apostolic Letter Issued 'Motu Proprio' Determining Norms for Mixed Marriages", 1970, 1, PMRH Box 74 Folder 32, University of Notre Dame Archives. [this is probably also published in *Origins*]

was concerned about the implications of mixed marriage for Catholic worship, for the education of children, and on the family structure, which he referred to as the "living cell of the Church."[60] As a result, the Church, "conscious of her duty, discourages the contracting of mixed marriages, for she is most desirous that Catholics be able in matrimony to attain to perfect union of mind and full communion of life."[61] With its focus on the home and its outright condemnation of the practice, the Catholic Church officially entered the era of rising rates of interfaith marriage with the same position as all of institutional Judaism: against contracting marriages across religious boundaries.

Nonetheless, the apostolic letter flagged two major changes in tone, if not in substance, in the Church's response. First, rather than referring to Protestants as heretics, Paul VI noted that "Although in the case of baptized persons of different religious confessions, there is less risk of religious indifferentism, it can be more easily avoided if both husband and wife have a sound knowledge of the Christian nature of marital partnership, and if they are properly helped by their respective Church authorities."[62] There is a notable shift in language here from earlier sources, where Protestants were "heretics" or "schematics." Now they were fellow Christians, in communion, however imperfect, with Christ. The acceptance of Protestants as potential, if not ideal, marriage partners, however, underscored that Jews, who did not accept Christ, were much less appropriate spouses for Catholics, ranked below Protestants. The Pope was not willing to condemn even those marriages, however, arguing that, "Even difficulties arising in marriage between a Catholic and an unbaptized person can be overcome through pastoral

[60] Ibid.
[61] Ibid.
[62] Ibid., 2.

watchfulness and skill."[63] While the Church, then, certainly opposed interfaith marriages, the Pope was willing to acknowledge that though more difficult, and less than ideal, with appropriate guidance from a religious authority, success was possible. In this, then, there were similarities between the formal position of the Reform movement and the Catholic Church (with the exception of the issue of rabbinic autonomy).

That said, in "Determining Norms for Mixed Marriages," the Pope did not endorse mixed marriage, defined primarily as marriage between Catholics and Protestants. He staked out the Church's disapproval and its concern for its children. He continued to require dispensations granted on the conditions that all Catholics remain "steadfast in their faith" and raise any children as Catholics, but did not rearticulate the requirement that the Catholic work for the conversion of his or her spouse. Again, as in Reform Judaism, the continuity of faith and community—as manifested through the children—took center-stage.

While the Catholic hierarchy creates policies with a monolithic voice, there were other Catholic voices in the process of creating those policies. For instance, as *The Christian Century* noted, Father Hans Kueng, the Swiss-born dean of the University of Tübingen and priest, argued throughout the 1960s for a much more liberal stance on mixed marriages. Specifically, he opposed viewing children of marriages between a Catholic and a non-Catholic outside of the Church as illegitimate and opposed the requirement that the Catholic partner work for the conversation of his or her spouse, views that, as demonstrated above, the Pope ultimately adopted. Assuming mixed marriages were between Christians, Kueng suggested that it was necessary for spouses to

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[63] Ibid.

respect each other's Christian faith. Additionally, he opposed the Church's requiring the children to be reared as Catholics, arguing that questions of baptism and education were "better left to the conscience of the parents."[64] Kueng voiced these opinions prior to debates on mixed marriage during Vatican II and again in 1967 during a Synod of Catholic Bishops that led, ultimately, to the positions proposed in the Papal *Matrimonia Mixa*.

Complicating the debate within the Catholic hierarchy, lay Catholics (like Jews) did not always agree with the positions of the Church. In 1980, for instance, *U.S. Catholic* published an article by a Dominican Sister, Daphne Mould, arguing that in fact the Church should encourage mixed marriages. She believed that mixed marriages were "ecumenism in action." Once again assuming that both members of the marriage are Christian, mixed marriage "is pioneering the loving unity of two different Christian traditions." This, she noted, required people of mature and courageous faith, but the potential, she argued, was immense. In order for the couple to approach this loving unity, she argued, the Catholic Church could not demand that the couple make "its old mixed marriage promises" in which the couple had to raise the children as Catholics and that the Catholic spouse had to work for the other's conversion. These requirements, she pointed out, "gave the other church involved the legitimate grievance that it was 'being bred out; in a sort of matrimonial genocide." Rather, she argued, the "happy marriage begins with boy meeting girl, and pastors and churches must realize that helping these people is the vital thing." In staking out this position, Mould took the stance that marriage was a

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[64] "Father Kueng Speaks on Mixed Marriages.," *Christian Century* 80, no. 15 (April 10, 1963): 453.

matter of romantic love between individuals, who were to be helped in their path together, rather than an affair of the churches for any other goal.

While Gould did not minimize the potential troubles facing Christians from different traditions, she argued that, with the goal of Christian unity, the churches involved would best help the couple by minimizing those differences rather than accentuating them. Specifically, she suggested inter-church baptismal services that would welcome children into both of their parents' faiths and would "give them the run of their parents' churches." With such strong grounding, the children could then select Catholicism or a Protestant denomination when they reached adulthood. She called for dual officiation of marriages and, whenever possible, full participation in each other's churches. Churches should reach out and welcome spouses from other Christian traditions into community life. As was *U.S. Catholic*'s practice with articles in its "Sounding Board" section, Mould's article was precirculated to a number of subscribers for their feedback along with a survey. *U.S. Catholic* then printed survey results and a representative sample of responses to the article. Notably, while 79% of the respondents wrote that they would prefer that their child not marry outside of their faith, 41% agreed with the statement, "I would rather see a Catholic marry a Protestant or a Jew of strong faith than a baptized Catholic of weak faith"; only 46% disagreed.

That almost half of the Catholic readers polled expressed preference for a person of strong, but different, faith over a weak Catholic demonstrated a fundamental difference between Catholic and Jewish populations. While Jews, regardless of differences in observance tended to regard each other as Jews and therefore part of the same community, *klal yisrael*, across degrees of faith, Catholics were primarily interested in a

community of the faithful. For some lay Catholics then, it was easier to imagine being in community with the differently faithful than with the non-faithful. The Catholic laity, then, had, by the 1980s, come to accept the concept of a tri-faith America, laid out by Herberg almost two generations before: they accepted that Protestants and Jews were their compatriots in American religion and that within tri-faith America, strong faith mattered more than its form.

Almost two-thirds of the readers polled believed that marriage between Catholics and Protestants would improve Christian unity. That did not, however, mean that a similar majority agreed with Mould that marriage to Protestants should be encouraged. Rather, for the bulk of the respondents, Christian unity was a positive outcome of an unfortunate marital choice. Readers, however, considered marriage to Protestants regrettable not because they were theologically suspect, but because they believed that mixed marriages added unnecessary burdens to the challenges of married life. Despite the variety of opinions on mixed marriages, one thing was clear. In 1980, 80% of the survey respondents said that if their child announced a mixed marriage, they would "tell them of the difficulties involved but express their acceptance." The tide had shifted in the Catholic world—mixed marriage was worrisome because it was potentially harder, not because it was sinful.

Within this lay Catholic conversation, members of interfaith marriages (largely to Protestants) brought very different experiences to the conversation that spoke to the everyday realities of negotiating practice, family, and community. In addition to survey results, *U.S. Catholic* included some readers' comments, representing a range of

viewpoints.[65] Among those responses were opposing views from intermarried couples. As Cynthia Rutter of Oklahoma wrote:

> As a Catholic married to a Protestant, I assure you that being of different faiths does make a big difference. You not only have to explain and defend every facet of your Catholicism to your partner, but also to your partner's family. It is especially trying when a joyous occasion, such as a baptism, is ruined when it must be done "over the dead body" of a parent-in-law. Being a Catholic is a way of life—not just a 45-minute attendance at Mass on Sunday.[66]

If Rutter experienced deep pain at the familial resistance that she felt from her spouse and his family, Patrick Hanley of Alaska wrote in to say that while he had experienced some difficulties in his marriage to a Mormon, he had been happily married for seven years and that those difficulties were "certainly not enough to destroy the marriage." Others presented dissenting opinions about the idea of raising children in two churches. D. E. Halpin of Florida worried that a dual religious upbringing put the children in the position of "serving two masters—perhaps neither one very well," whereas an anonymous respondent from North Dakota wrote that her children were Catholic, but had "no problem accepting anyone's faith." Their attitude, she explained, was, "Dad's a great guy, so his faith must be, too!" The respondents did not offer a consensus of agreement or disagreement on the question of interfaith marriage, good or bad, though they tended to agree that while the Church should accept it, they should not advocate for it. Concerns did not focus on the sacramental concerns outlined in some of

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[65] The Archives at Notre Dame has all of the reader responses on file in a restricted folder. While I was allowed to read them, I do not have permission to quote from them, as they included names of people who requested anonymity should quotes be published, Having read the file, I am confident that the sample selected by *US Catholic* was indeed representative.

[66] Mould, Daphane Pochin, March 1980, CUSC 11/01, University of Notre Dame Archives.

the debates over whether a Protestant could be free from sin at the moment of marriage. Rather, *U.S. Catholic*'s [67] respondents centered their responses on issues of family life: the presence or absence of familial tension, the clarity or confusion of the children's religious identities.

Defense of Marriage, Defense of the Individual: The Protestant Mainline Responds to Interfaith Marriage

Protestant responses to interfaith marriage were much less overtly articulated than those of Jews and Catholics. These more muted reactions were influenced by the status and assumption of Protestant Christianity as the baseline for mainstream American culture. As both Jewish and Catholic literature noted, particularly when arguing for rabbis and priests to officiate at intermarriages, Protestant clergy could be counted on to officiate at interfaith marriages, largely because of Protestant belief in the moral agency of the individual subject. This idea that marriage and sexual activity within marriage are the concerns not of the family or the community but of the individual is central to and rooted in early Protestant understandings of what it meant to be free from church control.[68]

In his section of the Armed Forces Pamphlet "What About Interfaith Marriage," Protestant Chaplain Fredrick W. Brink, Force Chaplain for the Cruise Deployer Force of the US Atlantic Fleet, outlined some of the key concerns of Protestant reflections on interfaith marriage, and while his comments reflected concerns about the implications of

[67] Mould, Daphane Pochin, March 1980, CUSC 11/01, University of Notre Dame Archives.
[68] Janet Jakobsen. "Sex+Freedom=Regulation: Why?", *Social Texts* 84-85 23.3-4 (2005), p. 292.

interfaith marriage for the American family, they were also deeply rooted in this understanding of the individual's ability to make autonomous religious and marital choices. This assumption of individualism lay not only at the heart of Protestant understandings, but also was braided into mainstream American understandings of the citizen.

Brink's first undertaking was to point out that there were many different internal differences between Protestant churches in terms of marriage; for instance, in terms of whether marriage was considered to be a sacrament. As a result, he viewed his task as only speaking to the commonalities in Protestant views of marriage. He argued that Protestants view marriage as a relationship "instituted by God, for the welfare and happiness of mankind.... It is a blending of the lives of the man and the woman in a manner acceptable to God, for their mutual growth, benefit, and happiness." Across the various Protestant sects, Brink maintained that Christian marriage was understood as originating in God and including God. While each individual denomination (and in some cases each congregation), had the right to "circumscribe marriage with rules that apply to that church's own adherents…. Protestants insist[ed] that no one church [had] the right to force its own rules upon persons who are identified with another church." In short, the individual believer had the right to choose her own Christian community according to the dictates of her own conscience, though once in that community, she was supposed to abide by the dictates of that denomination. If she then married a member of another religious group, she could freely choose to follow the dictates of that religious community. If she did not do so, she could not be compelled to by their moral and theological dictates.

Brink outlines key Protestant tenants of marriage, in a clear attempt to diffuse Catholic critiques of Protestant positions on both divorce and birth control. Protestants, he claimed, view the marriage relationship as permanent. Though divorce is permitted, there is not an assumption that marriage is to be entered into or exited lightly. Second, Protestants believed that the "to-be-desired completion of a marriage is the presence and training of children." Not only did the Protestant leadership share these commonalities with Catholic and Jewish understandings of marriage, but the relationship between the parents had to be considered not simply on its own merits but also as it would influence them as parents.

Given these two points as a base, Brink then turned his consideration to marriages between differing faiths. Protestants, according to Brink, believed that a marriage is an individual's own marriage before God and therefore do not believe that the clergy of any church can have "exclusive authority" over the marriage. The clergy only had authority over the partner who is their adherent, not the other spouse. Second, marriage is a process rather than an event. He argued that love was built over time and that elements of disruption, such as differing religious backgrounds, should not exist from the beginning of the relationship. Third, he claimed that marriages are strongest when the spouses have similar cultural backgrounds and Protestants, Catholics, and Jews have strong differences, not only in religious practice and obedience but also in their understandings of those elements. Fourth, children should be nurtured by both of their parents, and it is damaging to the integrity of the parent–child bond to require one parent to remain silent about matters religious. In this set of positions, as will be discussed, Brink is taking specific positions in terms of Catholic–Protestant conflict about interfaith

marriage, but in the end, he presents Protestants as agreeing with their co-religionists. "[I]t is far wiser, for the lasting success of the marriage, for the training and development of the children, for the permanent harmony of the home, to forgo a marriage involving conflicts of faith than to establish a marriage where almost certain friction and violation of integrity can be expected." Interfaith marriage, then, was problematic not because the other religious groups were somehow inherently lesser but because the tension that existed between these groups would undermine the marriage and the home. The claims of the differing religious communities, then, rather than inherent differences in belief, could undermine the peace and strength of the private family.

Brink's concerns encapsulated many of the Protestant mainline's concerns around interfaith marriage and generalized American concerns about the divorce rate. While other Protestant public voices shared his concerns about individualism, they did not agree that interfaith marriage might weaken the marital bond. As a result, Protestants were supportive of couples hoping to intermarry, as evidenced by the fact that when *The Christian Century*, the publication that served as the primary collective voice of the Protestant mainline, discussed mixed or interfaith marriage in the 1960s and 1970s, it largely framed those discussions as criticisms of the Catholic position.

The Christian Century approached intermarriage from a position of confidence in the continued social relevance of marriage and of support for individual rights that led to support, if not for intermarriage, for the right of individuals to enter into such marriages. The Protestant debate on interfaith marriage, then, was one that focused on the individual rights of the marrying couple, a conversation that was in marked contrast to the conversation among both the Catholic and the Jewish hierarchies, though it would later

be picked up, in popular culture and by individual intermarrying Catholics and Jews, as will be explored throughout the dissertation. As a result, interfaith marriage discussions in *The Christian Century* tended to focus on Protestant frustrations with the Catholic position, rather than on critiques of interfaith marriage itself.

The magazine was dismissive of the concern that intermarriages were more likely to cause divorce. For instance, in 1963 one author, Clark Elizey, endorsed that idea, writing "It seems clear that interfaith marriages are much more likely to break down than marriages between a man and woman of the same faith. Moreover, on the whole, couples concerned about religious values tend to remain married."[69] He then, however, asked whether staying married was actually the greater good. He pointed out that none of the survey data addressed the question of why religiously endogamous couples were more likely to stay married and suggested that it was possible that some of these couples stayed married for fear of community censure rather than for psychologically healthy reasons. If, he implied, divorce was the psychologically healthiest option, than it was better to divorce than to stay married. As a result, Elizey undercut one of the primary objections to interfaith marriage—the argument that it created unstable families, by suggesting that divorce was not, in and of itself, a bad choice in a marriage and by undermining the claim that, just because a religiously similar couple stayed married, their family life was notably better than that of an interfaith couple who did not.

Underscoring their confidence in the institution of marriage itself, a 1967 article entitled "Is Marriage Dying, Too?" came to the conclusion that not only was marriage likely to remain relevant, but also that social changes would likely strengthen the

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[69] W Clark Elizey, "The Divorce Phenomenon.," *Christian Century* 80, no. 14 (April 3, 1963): 424.

institution. He argued, "You may be sure that even with the pressure off, most young people will probably decide to get married just the same. If we can ever reach the point where they can do it as an act of real freedom, then we will have made marriage more meaningful, both for those who decide for it and those who decide against it."[70] Rather than saying that marriage would remain safe, the argument in this *Christian Century* piece suggested that marriage becoming an optional social practice would, in time, actually strengthen the institution of marriage, because those who entered it would do so with intention and the all-important American quality of freedom. Marriage, therefore, was safe from irrelevance. While the article did not go so far as to say that intermarriage was part of this larger choice, the aspect of choice placed intermarriage firmly within the range of acceptable options.

Protestant attitudes towards mixed marriage are clearest in their attacks on Catholic policy towards it. Repeated print space was given to the idea that Catholic laws on mixed marriage were among the strongest impediments to the ecumenical movement.[71] *The Christian Century* published pieces by and about Catholic leaders who disagreed with the Vatican's policy on mixed marriages, both to undermine the logic of those policies and to point to the hope of a more accommodating Church.[72] An editorial

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[70] Earl H. Brill, "Is Marriage Dying, Too?," *Christian Century* 84, no. 9 (March 1, 1967): 270.

[71] "Marriage Laws Create Interfaith Conflict.," *Christian Century* 79, no. 11 (March 14, 1962): 318; "Catholic-Protestant Marriages Still a Problem.," *Christian Century* 82, no. 27 (July 7, 1965): 860; "Gracious Gesture or Insult.," *Christian Century* 83, no. 24 (June 15, 1966): 769; "An Ecumenical Curtsy," *Christian Century* 83, no. 14 (April 6, 1966): 419–420.

[72] Richard W. Rousseau, "The Vatican and Mixed Marriages.," *Christian Century* 87, no. 32 (Ag 1970 1970): 963–970; "Father Kueng Speaks on Mixed Marriages."; "Cushing Wants Church Laws Liberalized," *Christian Century* 80, no. 26 (June 26, 1963): 820–

in *The Christian Century* outlined the Catholic position as unacceptable for five primary reasons: the Protestant is asked to cede all religious influence in the lives of his or her children; the Catholic laws put two basic humans drives, those of love and religion, in opposition to each other; the Catholic laws weaken the marriages of interfaith couples; rather than creating strong Catholics or Protestants, the Catholic position drives couples away from religious institutions; and lastly, the Catholic Church's policies on mixed marriage were, in the view of the editors of *The Christian Century*, in direct opposition to the Church's own Declaration on Religious Liberty. Two of these points, that the Church's position on interfaith marriage weakened marriages and drove families from organized religion, are fairly straightforward: to demand that the Protestant (or the Catholic) "betray" his or her religion created "handicaps" in the marriage which were "often crushing."[73] Similarly, rather than interfaith marriages creating more Catholics, as the Church had long hoped, the editorial suggested that both Roman Catholics and Protestants were learning that mixed marriages resulted in a "wide exit from the church."[74] The Protestant argument, articulated in this editorial, was that the Catholic Church and Protestant denominations would both be better served by trying to keep interfaith couples engaged in church life broadly, rather than giving them strict and potentially painful requirements in order to stay involved.

The other three arguments are interesting largely in the language that the editorial employed. First, while the Catholic instructions on mixed marriage were offered in the spirit of reconciliation with Protestants, *The Christian Century* argued that it did

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821; "Boston Archdiocese Accents Positive Ecumenism in Mixed Marriages.," *Christian Century* 86, no. 23 (June 4, 1969): 768.
[73] "An Ecumenical Curtsy," 420.
[74] Ibid.

"elementary injustices" to human beings, particularly Protestant ones. According to this Protestant viewpoint, the Catholic Church required the non-Catholic to "relinquish orally, though not in writing, all influence over the spiritual destiny of his unborn children and moreover, to confer upon an institution in which he does not believe tyrannical power over his children's religious education."[75] The issue at stake, in this example of the Protestant imagination, is the "tyrannical power" over the individual conscience. In the end, the individual has greater right to the spiritual care of his child than does a religious institution, as the properly thinking Protestant will surely agree.

Because the Catholic Church would still not consider Protestant marriages to be valid, however, the Protestant who wanted to honor the religion of his or her intended was essentially over a religious barrel. "If he has in him a grain of the Protestant principle that such an absolutizing of the future is evil, that such tyranny over him and over his children violates the conscience's sacredness, he must bury it under a Catholic altar as he speaks his marriage vows."[76] The language here is striking and indicative of violence—this Protestant periodical is accusing the Catholic Church of doing violence to the sacredness of the individual conscience in the very set of laws that the Church saw as a way to reach out to Protestants. The language also made clear the importance of the rights of the individual in Protestant thought.

The rights of the individual are echoed throughout the other critiques of Catholic policy towards interfaith marriage. The National Council of Churches objected specifically to the Catholic restrictions on Protestants entering into mixed marriages with Catholics, stating:

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[75] Ibid., 419.
[76] Ibid.

> Religion is a basic interest in human life, and differences of religion, if these are fundamental, may strain a marriage to the point of breaking, especially when they are aggravated by ecclesial interference. No religious body which confesses itself Christian can tolerate the imposition upon one of its own members of the requirements of another religious body by which the religious scruples of that member are aroused, or action repugnant to reason and conscience is forced upon him by an authority which he does not acknowledge.... If either partner enters upon the union as a propagandist, determined through the intimacies of marriage to subvert the religious faith of the other, disaster is immanent.[77]

The National Council of Churches articulated the concern that ecclesial disapproval increased the odds that the interfaith marriage would fail and that if the Catholic partner followed the church's dictate to attempt the conversion of a spouse, he or she would put an impossible strain on the marriage. More importantly, they argued that the Catholic hierarchy's attempt to control the behavior of the Protestant member of a Catholic/Protestant marriage was an affront to the couple's shared Christianity.

The Christian Century followed a similar theme. Because it is "demonstrably true" that an interfaith couple that remains interfaith can have a happy marriage, the Catholic mixed marriage laws dealt "unjustly with the sacred rights of men and women by playing against each other two of the most elementary and powerful human drives: romantic-sexual love and religious devotion."[78] The violation of these rights is strongest for the Protestant partner because he is the partner who must betray "one or the other of these drives — his love or his religion. He must promise the Catholic Church what his own church has taught he has no right to promise" or must walk away from love.[79] In perhaps the most striking critique of Catholic marriage law, this Protestant editorial

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[77] Lehmann, *Mixed Marriages in the Catholic Church*, ?.
[78] "An Ecumenical Curtsy.," 420.
[79] Ibid.

suggests that, in fact, the Catholic Church shares their value of individual rights: "[Vatican Council II's Declaration on Religious Liberty] senses profoundly and expresses unequivocally the sacred and inviolable rights of the individual conscience, rights which many of us believe are infringed by the mixed marriage laws."[80] In the Protestant view, the Catholic stance on interfaith marriage failed to live up to the promises of Vatican II, making its position on interfaith marriage hypocritical in the extreme.

If the Protestant media was deeply unsympathetic and even adversarial towards the Catholic position, however, they had much more patience for the Jewish perspective. Indeed, in discussing intermarriage, *The Christian Century* rarely spoke of Jews. Rather, Jewish concerns about intermarriage came up in defense of American Jewish "stridency" in defense of Zionism. On May 11, 1961, for instance, a group of rabbis prepared a statement in opposition to anti-Zionist remarks made by the historian and anti-Zionist intellectual Arnold J. Toynbee. Though the editors found the Jewish response to be somewhat extreme, they conceded that its tone was the result of an understandable "insecurity." The editors pointed out that American Judaism faced the threats of "intermarriage, adaptation, and assimilation," more even "than the rabbis might believe exists or hope for."[81] Though the editors argued that the rabbis overstated the full force of these threats, they wrote:

> But in spite of their illusions, we would give this round to the rabbis on points: if there are values in Jewish religion and race, they are best uttered out of a nurturing tradition, out of the Arcanum of Jewish thought. Quite obviously, intermarriage would score against the Jewish future. That Judaism has the right to legislate in relation to those who choose to be identified with it is obvious; that such legislation is wise or effective is

[80] Ibid.
[81] "Rabbis Rebuke Toynbee.," *The Christian Century* 78, no. 24 (June 14, 1961): 733.

> another question. But it is always ungracious for the "outsider" to wish non-being on a group having a valid religious heritage.[82]

While the editorial staff of *The Christian Century* was not certain that the Jewish response to interfaith marriage (which was, in the 1960s, to simply refuse to perform interfaith marriages and to sustain a strong community conversation against it) was the best one, they acknowledged fully that intermarriage posed a strong threat to the Jewish future. Jewish leaders were given the understood right to legislate the terms of Jewish marriage, because to allow an outsider, such as Toynbee or the editors themselves, seemed to also be legislating the potential non-existence of the Jewish people. While the editors may not have fully agreed with the Jewish approach, that skepticism takes a very different tone that the ascription of evil to the Catholic position.

Why then the different Protestant responses to Catholic and Jewish reactions to interfaith marriage? First, it is important to recognize that the Catholic objections to interfaith marriage between Catholics and Protestants had quite a bit to do with the lesser status of Protestants. If after Vatican II Protestants were seen as being in less perfect communion with Christ, as little as a decade before, official Catholic writings had referred to Protestants as schematics and heretics. It seems likely that while it did not needle Protestants to have Jewish leaders prefer that Jews marry Jews, implicit in the Catholic opposition to Catholic/Protestant marriage was the argument that Protestants were at best lesser Christians and at worst, not Christian at all. Secondly, Jews were not only a tiny proportion of the American population, but also in the 1960s awareness of the devastation of the Holocaust was growing in the American consciousness. While

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[82] Ibid.

individual ministers were indeed happy to marry Christian/Jewish couples that were denied marriage by their rabbis, it would have been very different matter for a leading Protestant publication to criticize attempts to stem the tide of Jewish intermarriage.

Conclusion

In examining the conversations being held among Jewish, Catholic, and Protestant leadership circles about interfaith marriage, one quickly comes to see that the issue is much more complicated than a simple split in opinion between Christians and Jews. Instead, the conversation needs to shift to a more nuanced and detailed understanding of the institutional and community stakes involved between particular Jewish and Christian communities. All three of the groups in question were caught up in concerns of their historical time and place. Both because of the ideological concerns about the American family during the Cold War and the rising divorce rate in the 1970s, Jews, Catholics, and Protestants all addressed the implications for interfaith marriage on the health of the couple and their home, though they came to distinctly different conclusions. Additionally, each group brought a distinct set of concerns to the table. The Central Conference of American Rabbis was deeply concerned about the impact of interfaith marriage on a dwindling Jewish population. Their response to interfaith marriage was torn between marking the boundaries of the group (by attempting to halt the tide of intermarriage) and by their belief in the universal qualities of Judaism, which suggested that an unaffiliated spouse could find meaning in the "Jewish faith" at the same time that it made it hard to present a clear reason why one should not intermarry.

For the Catholic hierarchy, in the United States and internationally, communal standards around the importance of the sacraments and the authority of the Church were changing in ways that directly impacted marriage. On the one hand, the Church held tightly to a sacramental theology of marriage that made marriage outside of its followers deeply problematic. On the other, Vatican II decreased the practices that made Catholics' and Protestants' lived realities markedly different, and as the Church moved into ecumenical relationships with Protestants, it tended to emphasize (though not enough for Protestant tastes) its commonalities with other Christians. The Catholic laity shared some of the views of their leadership, but demonstrated a very different set of concerns than did the leadership—they were interested not in questions of marital theology, but in the negotiations of daily life, where there were problems and where there were joys.

Mainline Protestants, meanwhile, had the most fluid understandings of community and largely put the communal interest second to the needs and rights of the individual. As they were the group with the broadest cultural influence, they were also the group most in step with generally American understandings of marriage in the time period. These community needs and standards, however, were not fixed points. How to respond to interfaith marriage and families was not a question with a monolithic answer, but instead, the beginnings of an ongoing conversation that continued to change and grow as each community did the same.

All of this has several implications for this project. A discussion of religious practice or of the quotidian details of interfaith marriage was remarkably absent from the conversations in the 1970s (or in the case of the Catholic Church of the policies that remained relevant in the 1970s). Rather, across the board in the 1970s, religious groups

were concerned with the question of how to prevent interfaith marriage; whether to prevent it; and for Catholics and Jews, if they could not prevent it, how to ensure that the family became part of their religious community. As the rest of the dissertation will demonstrate, this conversation largely disappeared after the 1980s. Marriage between Catholics and Protestants ceased to be a central focus of debate for either group, sacrificed in the name of ecumenical unity on other issues. While Catholic policies remained in place, individual priests and couples implemented them as they saw fit, and receiving a dispensation became a matter of course.

In Reform Jewish circles, however, the topic of interfaith marriage remained immediate and pressing, both for the leadership and for the laity. The focus, then, became the Christian/Jewish marriage. While part of the purpose of this chapter was to point out the real divisions between Catholics and Protestants, those conversations lost salience in a public debate about interfaith marriage that became about whether or not a couple could or should have a Christmas tree, whether traditions could or should be combined, and what it meant for Christian women to raise Jewish children. By the end of the 1970s, the Reform leadership had largely realized that they could not prevent interfaith marriage, and the conversation shifted to how best to address the reality that perhaps as many as 50% of Jews would marry non-Jews. The development of that conversation is explored in chapter four.

As noted above, the Protestant understanding of the individual as the autonomous moral unit has deeply influenced American culture. That reality is also traced out in the following chapters, as each depiction or negotiation of interfaith family life has to address the reality that the young American couples see themselves as having the right to marry

and consider their primary obligation to be to themselves and each other, over and above religious institutions, ideologies, or communities. While the Protestant mainline expressed the least interest in persuading interfaith couples to join their congregations, in many ways, they already had their hearts and minds.

Lastly, while the religious groups were most interested in the patrollable boundaries of communal life and in theological distinctions, television, film, advice manuals, and ethnographic experience points to a number of other factors in understandings of interfaith marriage: class, gender, and practice were as or more central to conversations about interfaith marriage than any questions of belief. Thus, these initial institutional conversations establish a baseline for the vocabulary—and disagreements—that will follow. Ultimately, the realities of interfaith life and the fears of the arbiters of organized religion would be redefined and reshaped through their encounters with one another.

Chapter Two
Blended or Transcended:
Christian and Jewish Families in Popular Culture, 1970–1980

In the iconic and Academy Award–winning 1977 movie *Annie Hall*, Woody Allen's character, the neurotic, New York Jewish comedian Alvy Singer, becomes romantically involved with the enthusiastic, but somewhat ditzy and unintellectual Annie Hall, late of Chippewa Falls, Wisconsin, played by Diane Keaton. In one of their first conversations, their different backgrounds as New York Jew and Midwestern Gentile become clear. Standing on her balcony, Annie observes, "You are what my Grammy Hall would call a real Jew." Alvy, unsure how to respond, settles on "Thank you," to which Annie replies, "Oh, she hates Jews."

Much later in the movie, when Alvy took his standup routine to a Wisconsin college campus, he and Annie have Easter dinner with her family. The scene cuts from the outside of the Halls' perfectly groomed colonial home to the dinner table, where everyone politely complimented the ham, though when Alvy says that the ham is "dynamite," Grammy Hall makes a silent expression of distaste. The camera shows her watching Alvy, and we see her perspective on him: a Hassid, with a full beard and *payos*. The conversation continues with a restrained discussion of swap meets and country club meetings, when Alvy turns to the camera and addresses the audience: He says Grammy Hall is a "classic Jew hater" and reflects that Annie's family looks American and healthy, like they never get sick. "They are nothing like my family," he explains. "The two couldn't be more different. Like oil and water." The scene cuts from the sedate dinner in the spacious Hall family dining room, where pauses stretch between comments, to a table

in a crowded apartment, where people loudly interrupt each other to discuss the medical conditions of shared acquaintances.

By exaggerating the stereotypes of Jewish Alvy and WASPy Annie, *Annie Hall* demonstrates a common pattern in popular depictions of interfaith marriage during the 1970s. During that period, institutional religions framed debates on interfaith marriage in terms of its impact on formal affiliation. They emphasized that its challenges could be solved through conversion and required at least an agreement to raise the child in a given religion in order to be married in that tradition, but popular culture has viewed these relationships from an entirely different perspective. In the 1970s, the rate of marriage between Christians and Jews was increasing sharply and drawing a great deal of attention, from both religious leaders and the media.

While interfaith marriage had been a theme in entertainment in the 1920s and 30s, when the Irish Catholic/Jewish marriage in plays such as *Abie's Irish Rose* and the serial movies *The Kellys and the Cohens* presented marriage as a way for both groups to assimilate into the American mainstream, interfaith marriage dropped out of sight during World War II and the postwar years, exploding back onto the scene in the 1970s. Most scholarly treatments of interfaith marriages in film and television use the depiction of the marriage as a barometer to gauge Hollywood's perception of Jews. This chapter instead mines these portrayals, not for their depictions of Jews, but rather for the insight that they give into what was an increasingly common trend—marriage between Christians and Jews. While chapter one deals with institutional reactions to rising numbers of interfaith marriages, this chapter explores the popular representations of this larger trend, and thus

shows how the popular depictions reflect a very different perception of interfaith family life than did the institutional debates.

This chapter also explores how popular media influenced attitudes toward interfaith marriage as well as the ways in which the media manifest cultural attitudes towards those marriages by looking at the symbols, codes, and images contemporary media employ in order to depict mixed marriage. Popular media complicates our understanding of what it meant to be an interfaith family in 1970s America. An examination of popular productions from the 1970s reveals a number of concerns about and understandings of interfaith families that were absent from the debates of religious leaders. Though popular media sources (movies, television, and literature) echoed some of the concerns of religious institutions, such as how to determine the religious identities of the children of interfaith marriage, they generally raised a different set of religious issues. These sources suggest that interfaith families encountered complex social negotiations over and above the theological and the affiliative. These negotiations included class and generational conflicts, differing food habits, and a shift from community demands to individual self-determination. In the end, however, although popular depictions offered practice-based understanding about what it could mean to be Jewish and, at times, Christian, they depicted intermarriage as largely about becoming "American." To that end, this article considers the young adult novel *Are You There God? It's Me, Margaret*, the movie *The Heartbreak Kid*, and the television shows *Bridget Loves Bernie* and *Little House on the Prairie.*

Popular culture in the 1970s largely posited the challenges of interfaith marriage as easy to overcome, functionally through a falling away of difference. The conflicts

depicted were located in the parental generation and were rejected by their assimilated children, as they fell in love across religious lines. Implicit in this narrative was an understanding of the married couple, their life choices, and their resulting nuclear family as the concern of the individual couples and not of their religious organizations, which were notably absent from the dramas, and only somewhat the concern of the previous generations. While this process was largely, in these examples, presented as becoming freed from religious tradition, it was also a deeply Protestant way of framing family, in keeping with mainline positions outlined in the previous chapter. In some sense, then, while interfaith families were presented as becoming American, marriage was also a means of assimilating into a Protestant identity.

This idea that marriage is the concern, not of the family or the community but of the individual, was central to these popular depictions. As Janet Jakobsen points out, this idea is inherently Protestant, rooted in early Protestant understandings of what it meant to be free from church control, and thus equally central to the national imagination.[83] In this individualized understanding of marriage, the couple had both the right to privacy and to autonomy in the decision-making about how to navigate their religious choices. The popular culture depiction of interfaith marriage was, then, inherently American and Protestant, both in its assumption of individual marital autonomy and in the model of interfaith marriage to which the couples in these popular depictions aspired and often achieved. The young, intermarrying Jewish men left behind their ethnic enclaves and the media stereotypes of Jews, either to join their Protestant sweethearts in Protestant worlds, or to join their Catholic sweethearts in stepping beyond ethnic identity into an assimilated

[83] Janet Jakobsen. "Sex+Freedom=Regulation: Why?", *Social Texts* 84-85 23.3-4 (2005), p. 292.

and culturally Protestant Americanness. Only in the early part of the decade and in depictions that focused on the resulting offspring rather than on the marrying couple, was this dynamic portrayed as problematic. Otherwise, in the world of popular media, interfaith marriage remained a solution to the problem of excess ethnicity, a social good because through intermarriage, a young couple could transcend any number of forms of difference, differences that were rooted in aspects of life beyond institutional affiliation or belief about God. These differences became fundamental to understandings of what complicated interfaith families and, as will be explored in chapter four, would go on to play a central role in later multicultural understandings of interfaith family life. In this chapter, however, it is through the transcendence of these differences that the young Catholic/Jewish couple, or the Jew marrying a Protestant, becomes more completely American.

Are You There God? It's Me, Margaret: A Focus on the Child

In one of the only early, enduring attempts to address the lives of children of religiously blended families, Judy Blume's 1970 young adult novel *Are You There God? It's Me, Margaret* became famous for its frank treatment of puberty and adolescent sexuality, but it also offered Blume's take on the emotional trials suffered by a child who, because of her parents' interfaith marriage, had been raised with no religion of her own. Margaret's religious dilemmas and her relationship with God and family raises three points worthy of analysis: First, the arguments within the family about religious identity in this book are based in utility—family members define the terms of religious identity to suit their own needs, rather than in reference to external standards. Second, despite a lack

of familial clarity about religious identity, Margaret has a robust relationship with God, unmediated by either a religious institution or by her family. Her need for a formal religious identity is portrayed as arising largely, if not exclusively, from social pressures. Finally, while Margaret ultimately decides that she is *no* religion, by the very terms her family uses to define religious identity, it is equally plausible to say instead that she is *both* religions, a hybrid. In this way, Margaret inhabits a world in which religion and culture are constant and evolving—sources of negotiation and conversation as well as conflict.

Blume published *Are You There God? It's Me, Margaret* a few years before interfaith marriage became a familiar sight on the large and small screens. In 1970, *The New York Times* recognized it as an Outstanding Book of the Year.[84] In 2001, *Publisher's Weekly* listed *Are You There God? It's Me, Margaret* as the eighth bestselling children's paperback book of all time: 6,478,427 copies of the book sold between its 1970 publication and 2000.[85] Additionally, in 2005, *Time Magazine* placed it on its All-Time 100 Best Novels, a list of the 100 best English language novels written after 1923, where it stands next to other shapers of culture, such as Kurt Vonnegut's *Slaughterhouse Five* and Virginia Woolf's *To the Lighthouse*.[86] In a 1970 review, a *New York Times* reviewer called *Are You There God? It's Me, Margaret* "a good book by any terms" and

[84] http://www.judyblume.com/reference/morebooks/bookawards.php
[85] Diane Britton Roback, Jason Turvey, and Debbie Hochman, "All-Time Bestselling Children's Books," *Publisher's Weekly*, December 17, 2001, 24.
[86] http://www.time.com/time/specials/packages/completelist/0,29569,1951793,00.html

reflected that Margaret's difficulties connecting God to organized religion is "a task far older folk have failed at," and one to which many would therefore relate.[87]

The parental figures in Margaret's life respond to questions of religious identity in two ways. Although the parents in *Are You There God?* are not interested in providing Margaret with a religious identity, even to the extent of stripping Christmas of theological content, her grandparents actively attempt to determine her religious identity. In 1970, when the book was published, only Reconstructionist Judaism, the smallest Jewish movement, allowed for patrilineal descent. The Reform movement would not move to matrilineal and patrilineal decent for over a decade, yet at no point in the text does Sylvia, Margaret's paternal, Jewish grandmother, or her rabbi, suggest that because Margaret's mother is not Jewish, then, by definition, neither is Margaret. [88] Instead, she asks Margaret if she has boyfriends, and if so, are they Jewish? When Margaret asks to go to synagogue with her, Sylvia views the request as proof that Margaret really is a Jewish girl (even though, ultimately, Margaret will try two Protestant church services and wander into a Catholic confessional). Interestingly, the only concrete information that Margaret receives about Rosh Hashanah comes from her Christian mother, who sends her to services in new clothing because one buys clothes for the high holidays.

Whereas Margaret's Jewish grandmother is a close and affectionate figure, her Christian grandparents are total strangers, just as their religious practice is unknown to her. They had disowned her mother because she married a Jew, and Margaret meets them for the first time during the course of the novel. The Christian grandparents assume that

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[87] Dorothy Broderick, "The Young Teen Scene," *New York Times* (New York, November 8, 1970).
[88] Sylvia Barack Fishman, *Double or Nothing?: Jewish Families and Mixed Marriage* (Brandeis, 2004), 127.

Margaret has been raised as a Protestant, asking about her Sunday School attendance and expressing surprise that she has not been baptized. Margaret's mother is surprised that her parents assume that Margaret is receiving a Christian religious education. Mrs. Hutchins, the Christian grandmother, has a simple answer. "A child is always the religion of the mother. And you, Barbara, were born Christian. You were baptized. It's that simple."[89] Just as Sylvia sidesteps definitions of what makes a child Jewish according to Jewish law, Mrs. Hutchins avoids faith-based definitions of what makes one Christian. One of the tropes of discussions of interfaith marriage is that Christianity is rooted in belief, rather than in practice, in contrast to Judaism, rooted in practice, rather than belief. But here, Mrs. Hutchins believes that Barbara is still Christian because of her birth into a Christian family and her baptism. Even her rejection of the faith and its beliefs does not, in her mother's eyes, render her incapable of passing Christianity on to Margaret.

Several points can be raised in relation to Margaret's exchanges with her grandparents. First, Sylvia, the Jewish grandmother, did not tie religious identity to its traditional markers such as practice, belief, faith, law, or ethical worldview. Instead, her understanding of religious identity moved to cultural and familial connections. You are Jewish because you eat corned beef on rye from an actual New York deli. While the Christian grandparents turned to a more conventional marker, baptism, they explained Margaret's religious identity in familial terms: One is Christian and should be baptized because one's mother is Christian and has been baptized. It might be worth asking why the grandparents turned to the cultural elements that they chose, rather than either a language of God or the definitions of the church or synagogue. No doubt the cultural

[89] Judy Blume, *Are You There God? It's Me, Margaret* (Laurel Leaf, 1991), 133.

elements were important to them, but they were also choosing the claims that worked best for their own agendas. Sylvia wanted very much for Margaret to be a "Jewish girl." Why, then, would she point out the Jewish law of matrilineal descent, which she certainly would know about, but would that work against her own desires? Similarly, it works against Grandmother Hutchins's agenda to define Christianity narrowly. If she located Christianity in a belief in Jesus Christ, she could not consider Margaret Christian, since Margaret's relationship to God was not at all Trinitarian. If she defined it by baptism, Margaret could potentially *become* Christian, but she would not currently *be* Christian. The arguments within the family about what make for religious identity in this book, then, were primarily based on utility.

While all of the grandparents were dedicated to religious institutions, as far as the reader knows, none of them shared the intimate relationship that Margaret has with God. Despite not having had a formal religious upbringing, and despite having parents who vocally disapprove of religion, Margaret talks to God, confiding in him her fears about making friends and about puberty.[90] God is a constant in Margaret's life, a source of comfort and reassurance through transitions, but is defined outside of either Christianity or Judaism.

If God was constant for Margaret, religion plays played a much more ambiguous role. On the one hand, when her new sixth-grade teacher asks the students to list things that they liked and disliked on the first day of school, Margaret lists religious holidays in the "dislike" column, which implies some tension over religion. That said, after a conversation with her new friends, who are dumbfounded that Margaret is neither

[90] Ibid., 14, 16.

Christian nor Jewish and demand to know whether her family will join the YMCA or the JCC, Margaret observes that this confusion over religion is a new problem.[91] In New York, she claims, no one cared about religion. Although tension may have arisen around the competing family needs, Margaret's lack of a formal affiliation does not strike her as a problem until she enters a suburban society in which religious identity is an essential piece of social classification. External pressures, rather than an internal sense of need, drive Margaret to desire formal religious affiliation.

Margaret investigates formal affiliation through a year-long school project on "something meaningful to you," assuring God that she will check in along the way about her progress. "Are you there, God? It's me, Margaret. What would you think of me doing a project on religion? You wouldn't mind, would you, God?... I think it's time for me to decide what to be. I can't go on being nothing forever, can I?"[92] Margaret explores institutional religion through a series of visits to church with friends and to synagogue with her grandmother, but she does not find a religious home, specifically because none of the traditions with which she experiments give her a sense of God's presence. "I've been looking for you, God. I looked in temple. I looked in church. And today, I looked for you when I wanted to confess. But you weren't there. I didn't feel you at all."[93] Margaret searches for a religious home that gives her a sense of God as she knows him from her private space, but she finds religious institutions to be formal and foreign places, lacking the comfort and support that she finds in her own private relationship with God.

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[91] The Young Men's Christian Association and the Jewish Community Center, respectively
[92] Blume, *Are You There God?*, 53.
[93] Ibid., 120.

Margaret's desire to find a religious identity is located in social pressure, a desire to know whether she belonged at the Y or the JCC, but the pain that it causes remains sharp. At the end of the year, instead of turning in an elaborate project like her classmates, Margaret writes her teacher a letter. "I don't think a person can decide to be a certain religion just like that. It's like having to choose your own name. You think about it a long time and then you keep changing your mind. If I should ever have children I will tell them what religion they are so they can start learning about it at an early age. Twelve is very late to learn."[94] Rather, she suggests, one needs to be raised in a religion, in order to find in it what Margaret finds when she talks to God.

Was it possible in 1970 to imagine a child of interfaith marriage as both Jewish and Christian? Though Judy Blume did not go on to make the argument, I suggest that the familial validation of a religious identity rooted in culture opens the door to a religious hybridity that *Are You There God?* overtly argues is impossible. If what makes one Jewish is a penchant for certain foods or dating Jewish men and if one is Christian because one's mother was baptized, clearly all of those things are true of Margaret, and thus she could be seen as being of both religions. Nevertheless, the novel does not resolve Margaret's confusion about organized religion and in avoiding doing so, it offers pushback against the notion of assimilation that the rest of this chapter explores. In assimilating "beyond" a religious identity, Margaret did not feel more like she belonged, but rather she felt out of step with the world around her, lacking something that she perceived everyone else as having.

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[94] Ibid., 143.

The Ghetto Girl and the Shiksa Goddess: Gendered Stereotypes and *The Heartbreak Kid*

If *Are You There God?* demonstrates some of the fears about the damage that interfaith marriage can inflict on children, the 1972 film *The Heartbreak Kid*,[95] directed by Elaine May and with a screenplay by Neil Simon, makes interfaith marriage look acceptable, understandable, and even desirable. *The Heartbreak Kid* harkened to a traditional social model that assumed interfaith marriage offered a path into the American "mainstream.". The inherent value of assimilation was demonstrated through the gendered stereotypes of what it meant to be Jewish and Gentile: the ghetto girl and the shiksa goddess.[96] Just as historian Riv-Ellen Prell's work suggests that films of the early 20th century implied that endogamous marriage to a woman of stereotypically Jewish and deeply undesirable characteristics could hold back one's process of assimilation, in the early 1970s, *Heartbreak Kid* offers a similar narrative. Conversely, marriage to a Protestant woman could move the Jewish man into established and elite echelons of society.[97]

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[95] Elaine May, *The Heartbreak Kid*, 1972.

[96] The term "ghetto girl" is drawn from Riv-Ellen Prell, *Fighting to Become Americans: Assimilation and the Trouble Between Jewish Women and Jewish Men*, 1st ed. (Beacon Press, 2000). The term *shiksa goddess* is drawn from interviews with a Jewish woman who explained that as she was coming of age in the 1970s, she came to understand that Jewish men did not want to marry her or her Jewish friends, they wanted to marry "shiksa goddesses."

[97] As Anne Rose demonstrates, Catholic and Jewish men used marriage to Protestant women as ways of joining established (and Protestant) society in the 19th century. The men, whatever their private convictions, would act as secular citizens in public space and allow their wives to set the religious tone of their homes and dictate the religious training of the children.
Anne Rose. *Beloved Strangers*.

Heartbreak Kid contrasts the two marriages of Lenny Cantrow, played by Charles Grodin: the first to Lila Kolodny, played by Jeannie Berlin, and the second to Kelly Cochran, played by Cybil Shepherd. The contrast between the brides, who are archetypical in their characters, leaves the viewer in total sympathy with Lenny's desire to leave the crass Lila for a life with the more refined Kelly. The film opens with the New York, Jewish wedding of Lenny and Lila. After a wedding and lunch, shot through a soft filter and yellow light that served to make the wedding seem both drab and unreal, they depart down I-95 for their Florida honeymoon. On their wedding night, in their dingy motel room with the sound of cars passing on the highway and by the light of their headlights, Lenny discovers that his bride is sexually crass, interested in loud and vigorous, rather than romantic, sex and upfront about the functions of her body, announcing her need to "tinkle" as she gets out of their bed. Upon their arrival in Florida, he learns that she is materially and emotionally demanding.

Lila, who is insatiable in both her carnal and gastronomic appetites, epitomizes the image of the ghetto girl, a trope that historian Riv-Ellen Prell identifies as reflecting Jewish discomfort with the struggle to achieve middle-class prosperity rather than with the actual characteristics of Jewish women.[98] Prell argues that in early twentieth century depictions of Jewish marriage, marriage between Jews was troubled both by an inherent vulgarity associated with the "old world" and by the fear that marriage to another Jew would impede one's own ability to assimilate. In *Heartbreak Kid*, the awe that Lila expresses at the opulence of their surroundings and her loud enthusiasm demonstrates

[98] Prell, *Fighting to Become Americans*.

that she, and therefore they as a couple, cannot assimilate into the upper-class "nice" American society.

Kelly, by contrast, is quintessentially American. Lenny first spots the blonde and delicately lovely Kelly frolicking in the waves while they are both alone on the beach. The viewer gets very little sense of Kelly as a person, with interests or a personality; she exists largely as a reflection of Lenny's desires. When Lenny joins Kelly's family for drinks, however, the viewer realizes that just as Lila is overwhelmed by the luxurious resort, the Cochrans view it as utterly normal, nothing so special. By the time Lenny tells Lila that he wants a divorce and sets out to woo and marry Kelly, the viewer is on his side, not seeing him as a man deserting his wife because someone better came along, but rather as a sensitive man who has accidently yoked himself to someone who is a parody of "lower class" habits and who is freeing himself from the marriage that traps him and keeps him from the life that he *could* lead. Kelly and her family offer Lenny access into an upper-class social milieu.

Though Kelly's religion is never explicitly mentioned, her relationship with Lenny is clearly coded as interfaith. Kelly's Christianity, while evident in her high church wedding, is marked by the ethnically neutral identity of the American White Anglo Saxon Protestant. Indeed, her last name, Cochran, suggests a Scottish Protestant family background. The wedding is the only moment of overt Christianity. Otherwise, it is coded as part of what it means to be an American. The Cochran family is from Minnesota, a place that represents an American ideal of wholesome "niceness" in the media world of

the 1970s.[99] Kelly's Midwestern, All-American charm is underscored when Lenny arrives on her campus, in a Minneapolis winter, to find Kelly, in a blue winter hat that sets off her blonde hair, surrounded by football players. The difference between Kelly and Lila is underscored by their sexuality: in contrast to the dingy motel room wedding night scene, Kelly and Lenny first make love by firelight in the total privacy of a secluded winter lodge. The scene is romantic and appealing, rather than comic and mildly repulsive. Kelly, then, is depicted as refined, part of the American cultural elite and religious mainstream.

Kelly's beauty is coupled with her family's ability to elevate Lenny into a new social milieu. The closing scenes of the movie are of the couple's wedding reception, surrounded by Kelly's family and their circle. No one from Lenny's earlier wedding is in evidence. Lenny has left them behind as he has assimilated into this new environment, and if he seems a bit stiff in his new world, his children will fit in, comfortable with the privileges that they, like their mother, will take for granted.

In showing intermarriage as a path to assimilation, *Heartbreak Kid* represents a longstanding link between intermarriage and assimilation into a dominant, Protestant, American norm. Historian Anne Rose demonstrates that in the nineteenth century, a common path of assimilation for a Jewish man was the one that Lenny is depicted as taking in the second half of the twentieth century: to marry a Protestant woman and be

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[99] Victoria Johnson, *Heartland TV: Prime Time Television and the Struggle for U.S. Identity* (New York: New York University Press, 2008), 112–146.
Johnson argues that the Midwest in general stands, in popular culture, for a more authentic American experience, as opposed to the coasts with their immigrants or the South with its evident regionalism. In particular, she looks at Minnesota niceness as a source of iconic nostalgia, in *The Mary Tyler Moore Show* and *Newhart*.

taken under her father's wing, professionally and socially.[100] Prell's work further suggests that not only were such choices potentially personally advantageous, but also throughout the twentieth century, those assimilationist tendencies supported a national ideal. Anyone could become an American through proper acculturation.[101] It is interesting to note that as Lenny became part of the Cochran family's world, there was no sense that he was losing anything in giving up his city, his family, his traditions, or beliefs. The picture is of appealing social ascent.

Heartbreak Kid is the only example of a stark contrast between the Jewish and the Gentile bride from the 1970s that I will consider in this chapter, as well as the one carrying the most positive associations with assimilation. Perhaps in part this is because in the early 1970s, American culture was only at the beginning of a shift from an assimilationist to a multicultural society; however, throughout the 1970s and beyond, these themes remain as an undercurrent to many depictions of interfaith family life. Certainly, and in the intentional blendings of practices explored in chapter 5, popular culture in the 1970s suggested that the goal was to transcend, rather than to incorporate, Jewishness.

While the extreme example of the Jewish wife, divorced for a gentile bride, did not recur, most of the interfaith couples did portray Jewish men married to Christian women. Similarly, even though no other show took the assumption that assimilation is desirable and inevitable quite so overtly, the assumption that "American" is preferable to "ethnic," and that American is associated with the Christian family, floated beneath the

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[100] Anne C. Rose, *Beloved Strangers: Interfaith Families in Nineteenth Century America* (Harvard University Press, 2001).
[101] Prell, *Fighting to Become Americans*.

surface of other media depictions of interfaith marriage, occasionally bubbling up as a topic of particular concern. The lack of conversation about this process is remarkable: Lenny simply became "American" and to be American is, in part, to be able to exist in Protestant society. While the other media examples from the decade depicted happy interfaith couples, they nonetheless pointed out the various negotiations that must occur in order for the couple to achieve their happiness. Thus, they all still held some of the assumptions about the goal of assimilation or about gender roles, but they claimed to approach their subject matter in a more sophisticated way.

Bridget Loves Bernie and the Conflict between Religious Leaders and Media Images

If the interfaith relationship in *Heartbreak Kid* barely acknowledges potential tensions caused by a romance between members of different religions, the one-season CBS hit *Bridget Loves Bernie* shows, both in its depiction of interfaith family life and in its public reception, a considerably more fraught relationship. The show features the wealthy Irish Catholic Bridget, played by the blonde Meredith Baxter, opposite the taxicab-driving, playwriting, working-class Jewish Bernie, played by the swarthy David Birney. *Bridget Loves Bernie*, its popularity, and the anxiety that it triggered all provide insight into cultural perspectives on interfaith marriage in the 1970s, as well as into how popular culture and formal religious communities were not always in agreement about this obviously contentious issue. Indeed, like *Bridget Loves Bernie*, the popular depictions of interfaith marriage created during the 1970s demonstrated different concerns than did religious leaders, based in many cases on different understandings of

what was important about Jewish and Christian identity: social class, food habits, rituals, and religious identity of the children, all of which were heightened and refracted through the differences in attitude between the intermarrying couple and their parents' generation.

CBS pulled the sitcom *Bridget Loves Bernie* off the air in 1973 after receiving letters of complaint and public criticism from Jewish groups and individuals about the title characters' interfaith marriage. They gave the official explanation that they were experiencing a ratings dip in their Saturday night lineup, between the popular shows *All in the Family* and the *Mary Tyler Moore Show*.[102] For most of its first (and only) year on the air, however, *Bridget Loves Bernie* ranked in the top five of the Nielson ratings, making it the most highly ranked television show to be canceled in the history of television, a position that it holds to this day.[103] Prominent Jewish groups quickly denounced the network's new show, which went into reruns after twenty-two episodes and stopped airing at the end of the 1972–1973 season. The network denied canceling it because of pressure from the Jewish community, claiming that it received very few letters complaining about the show's content (200 compared to the 6,000 that it received for the content of the contemporaneous show, *Maude*, in which the title character had an abortion).[104] Leaders from the Synagogue Council of America, an organization that included Reform, Conservative, and Orthodox Jewish leaders, met with a CBS official to

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[102] "Television," *New York Times* (New York, September 16, 1972). 59

[103] Tom Shales, "'Live from Bagdhad': The Cameras of War; Timely Tale of CNN's Defining Moment," *The Washington Post*, December 7, 2002, Final Edition edition, sec. Style, C01.
"CBS Hears Complaints: Rabbis Don't Love Bridget," *Jewish Post and Opinion*, January 19, 1973.

[104] "Protests Had No Influence? Network Says Bridget-Bernie Going Off the Air for Good," *The Jewish Week*, April 5, 1973.

explain their objections to the show and demand its cancelation.[105] The official, Thomas Swafford (vice-president in charge of program practices), explained that the show could not be canceled because of the "long-run consequences" of what bowing to censorship would do to television generally.[106]

Whether the protests were the reason that CBS canceled the show or whether CBS really was concerned about a slight ratings dip in their line-up, complaints were certainly vociferous, at least in the Jewish press and in some Jewish communities. Not only did the Synagogue Council of America arrange to meet with network officials, but also individual rabbis and laypersons from locations around the country wrote letters to CBS and used their pulpits to object to the sitcom's content.[107] The Rabbinical Council of Greater Washington called for "sincere-minded members of every religious denomination to show their disapproval of 'Bridget Loves Bernie' by refusing to watch the show, by boycotting the products of the program's sponsor, and by writing letters of protest to WTOP-TV and to the CBS network in New York."[108] They were not alone in calling for boycotts—numerous congregational rabbis publicly listed sponsors of the show and called for Jews and others to write to sponsors, local networks, and to CBS.

Viewers had specific concerns about the show. Articles in the Jewish press expressed concerns that *BLB* downplayed the problems faced by interfaith couples, making such relationships more appealing than they actually would be in real life. Letters to the editor in *The New York Times* echoed these concerns, worrying that *BLB* would

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[105] http://www.cjh.org/academic/findingaids/ajhs/nhprc/SCA02.html
[106] "CBS Hears Complaints: Rabbis Don't Love Bridget."
[107] "Bridget Loves Bernie Under Fire: Rabbis Upset, Some Call for Boycott of Show's Sponsors," *Jewish Post and Opinion*, December 8, 1972.
[108] Ibid.

make Jewish young people think that it was "romantic and chic" to marry a gentile and would therefore encourage intermarriage by offering a such an attractive example.[109] Others, writing out of the belief that intermarriage was the greatest threat to Jewish continuity in the late 20th century, suggested that the show was in massively poor taste. As one man wrote to the *Times*, a comedy about interfaith marriage was as tactless as "a series about the merry adventures of a Jewish family on their way to the gas chambers."[110] For all of these writers, Jewish–Christian intermarriage was simply unacceptable, and television had a social responsibility not to make light of, or seem to support, such a lifestyle. The response from Jewish leadership, across movements, and from some Jewish lay voices demonstrates significant tension between the popular American response to interfaith marriage and the fears of those who worried about the impact of intermarriage on communal Jewish life and even Jewish survival, a tension that stemmed from the suggestion that the young couple could transcend his Judaism and her Catholicism in order to be young American individuals in love.

Interestingly, while many Jewish audiences objected vociferously to this portrayal of intermarriage, Catholics and the Catholic Church were largely absent from the protests against *BLB.* Houston's Rabbi Jack Segal cited Catholic objections to the show as well, noting an article in *The Catholic Visitor* disapproving of its portrayals of Catholic–Jewish intermarriage. Otherwise, there was very little Catholic comment. In her work on controversial primetime television, historian Kathryn Montgomery points out that

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[109] Edward B. Fiske, "Some Jews Are Mad At Bernie," *New York Times (1923-Current File)*, February 11, 1973; "CBS Hears Complaints: Rabbis Don't Love Bridget"; "Bridget Loves Bernie Under Fire: Rabbis Upset, Some Call for Boycott of Show's Sponsors."
[110] David Zurawik, *The Jews of Prime Time*, The Brandeis Series in American Jewish History, Culture, and Life (Hanover: Brandeis University Press, 2003), 93.

Catholics spent the 1973–1974 television season protesting CBS for another reason: they were largely occupied with protests against Maude's abortion.[111] Additionally, while Jews were deeply concerned about interfaith marriage to Christians, Catholics were primarily concerned with marriage between Catholics and Protestants, not between Catholics and Jews. While the Catholic Church did not approve of Catholic–Jewish marriage, it was simply not an issue with the same energy in Catholic circles.

During the 1973–1974 season, *BLB* addressed the trials and tribulations in the marriage and family life of Jewish, working-class Bernie Steinberg and Catholic, wealthy Bridget Theresa Mary Colleen Fitzgerald Steinberg.[112] Because the sitcom appeared in the early stages of a skyrocketing intermarriage rate occurring in America at the time, it captured something of the heightened anxiety about what intermarriage meant, for religious communities as well as for intermarried families, in light of these rapidly shifting demographics. Like its contemporary show, *All in the Family*, *BLB* addressed an area of social change with lighthearted humor based largely in stereotypes. In doing so, the show gives a glimpse into what cultural producers in Hollywood believed were the pressing issues facing interfaith couples and their extended families; the show's popularity demonstrates that it struck a chord well beyond the numbers of people actually intermarrying.

Bridget Loves Bernie's depiction of interfaith marriage, as a way for children to differentiate themselves from their immigrant parents and assimilate into American society, was not new, indeed the show was a remake of the 1922 play, *Abie's Irish*

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[111] Kathryn C. Montgomery, *Target: Prime Time Advocacy Groups and the Struggle Over Entertainment Television* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 40.
[112] Richard Kinon et al., *Bridget Loves Bernie,* DVD, n.d.

Rose.[113] Though the sitcom had some structural differences in the makeup and geographies of the families, they echoed specific scenes, for instance, parents insisting on Jewish and Catholic wedding officiants. In the original, *Abie's Irish Rose*, the young couple's initial wedding took place before a Protestant minister, and at the insistence of the couple's fathers, a rabbi and a priest performed additional weddings. In *BLB*, the couple married before a justice of the peace before marrying again in a co-officiated ceremony with a rabbi and a priest (a scenario that would not have been feasible in the real-life 1970s).

Bridget Loves Bernie was new and distinct for two reasons. First, the character of Bernie was the first Jewish lead to appear on television in eighteen years, since the cancelation of *The Goldbergs* in 1954. Second, its immense popularity on network television brought the topic of interfaith marriage into homes across the country, a far wider range than the Broadway play had. Lastly, social context is important. In the 1920s, the era of *Abie's Irish Rose*, Jewish–Gentile intermarriage rates were relatively low, 3.2%.[114] Interfaith marriage, then, was a vehicle for exploring assimilation as a social good (from the standpoint of American society). In the 1970s, interfaith marriage itself

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[113] *Abie's Irish Rose* is the story of Jewish Abie and Irish Catholic Rose, who were secretly married by a Protestant minister as they knew that neither of their widowed fathers would support the marriage. By concealing Rose's background, they gained Abie's father's support, and they were married by a rabbi, with Abie's father believing that this is their first wedding. At the close of the wedding, Rose's father arrived with a priest, believing her intended groom to be Catholic. When the parents realized that the children wished to marry, they aired any number of stereotypical and bigoted opinions while the priest and the rabbi struck up a friendship. In the end, the couple was married a third time, by the priest. Both fathers disowned the children, only to be reconciled a year later, when they discovered that the young couple has had twins, and that one twin was named for each grandfather.

[114] Keren McGinity, *Still Jewish: A History of Women and Intermarriage in America* (NYU Press, 2009), 219.

was the central issue, and while interfaith marriage was distinctly tied, in the 1970s, to a process of assimilation, the social nerve that it touched, as evident from the Jewish communal response, was around the question of the marriages themselves.

Rather than focus on the religious affiliation of the couple or their beliefs, as did institutional religion, *BLB* raised ethnic and ontological questions of language, food, class, and appearance, along with the occasional question about religious practice. These themes, as we have seen, are echoed in the previously examined examples as well. The focus on family life rather than on formal religious observance, however, set *BLB* apart. Following the formula set by previous generations' depictions of interfaith family life, these concerns are presented as those of the older generation, in this case the parents of baby boomers. The young couple, Bernie's African-American best friend Otis, and Bridget's brother Father Mike, a Catholic priest, are completely comfortable with the religious differences in the relationship. While both Bridget and Bernie express moments of concern in the pilot episode, their conflicts always resolve quickly in a solution facilitated by their romantic love. Their strongest ally remains Father Mike, whom the audience might expect to respond with concern to the young couple's announcement of their desire to marry, especially if one was aware of the voluminous literature on intermarriage produced by the Catholic Church. When they come to him with the situation, he responds by saying, "Well if you are really serious about this, there is only one thing to do!" "Yes?" asks the nervous couple. "Go out to breakfast!" exclaims Mike. Bernie is outraged. "What kind of priest are you?" he asks. "An understanding one, I hope," responds Mike, ushering the couple out the door. Father Mike, then, is presented as far more a member of the younger generation than a representative of the Church,

siding with the young couple and further watering down the stereotypes of Catholicism in the show, as his character aligns more with the values of Protestant individualism than with the stance that the Catholic hierarchy actually brought to the question of intermarriage.

If Bridget and Bernie expected trouble, they got it from their parents in spades. The fact that humorous conflicts with the parents will shape the direction of the show becomes evident in the pilot episode. In depicting the religious and ethnic tensions between the Steinbergs and the Fitzgeralds, food, and the different foods of each family, plays a starring role in the pilot: the courting couple has a meal with each family. Bernie's mother, Sophie Steinberg, cooks a meal of traditional Eastern European dishes, including gefilte fish and horseradish. Bridget claims to love both dishes, though the potency of the horseradish gives her a bit of a struggle. The meal is a hazing ritual of hospitality, and Bridget clearly realizes that she is being judged. Her presence strains the conversation, enough of which is in Yiddish that there is a discussion about whether the jokes will be funny in translation. The table is groaning with food, and Sophie dishes up extra helpings before dessert, when she forces the overfull Bridget to eat a prune Danish, arguing that she "got it special." Bridget takes a bite and runs to the bathroom, causing Bernie's father to exclaim, "A gentile, a Catholic, a frail stomach! That combination could ruin any marriage."

Shortly thereafter, Bernie appears for dinner at Bridget's family table. In contrast to Bernie's family's meal, in which his mother dishes up food, a gentleman servant serves the family at a meal that is restrained and reserved. Mrs. Fitzgerald has chosen ham for the main course, though she has "considerately" provided salami for Bernie. Singling out

Bernie for different food underscores his difference from the Fitzgeralds and the combination of the class and religious difference (based on the experience of the meals) causes Bernie initially to decide against the marriage, because he thinks they are too different. Bridget ultimately persuades Bernie to go through with the marriage, with a kiss that clearly promises more. Still, the meals have set up the tension that provides the primary story arc for the sitcom. In this instance, food customs demonstrate a way to depict the families as drawing their religious and ethnic boundary lines, one designed to make it very clear to the young couple (and to the viewer) exactly who the outsider is.

Bridget Loves Bernie presents the cultural and religious importance of food as a primary site of generational tension. While Bridget's inability to cook is a source of humor, there is little concern about *what* to cook, and, in fact, when she tries to learn traditional Jewish dishes, Bernie objects. An incident arises when Mrs. Steinberg comes upstairs to drop off Bernie's galoshes. Bridget is cleaning up the table, and Mrs. Steinberg learns that Bernie had not finished his breakfast. Bridget explains that Bernie was not hungry, to which Mrs. Steinberg responds, "Eggs with ham? I am not surprised." Bridget, puzzled and a bit defensive, responds, "Well, I make it for him every morning. It is practically his favorite breakfast." Mrs. Steinberg argues that although Bernie may *say* that he likes ham, and that he may even *believe* that he likes ham, "deep down, he is Jewish" and that living with "Catholic cooking" will eventually harm him. While Mrs. Steinberg argues that Bridget's cooking is Catholic, there is nothing distinctly Catholic about her breakfast choice (nor is it associated with a known Catholic ethnic group, like Italian pancetta or Irish corned beef). Rather, the problem is that eating of ham marks

assimilation, away from Jewish dietary laws and toward mainstream American (non-Jewish) foodways.

Bridget, in her fears for the wellbeing of Bernie and her marriage, cooks a kosher dinner of matzo ball soup and boiled chicken. She says the *hamotzi* before the meal, and when Bernie's uncle offers a toast, everyone says "*L'Chaim*," except for Bernie, who says "Cheers." These incidents surrounding food prompt Bridget to learn many aspects of Jewish religious practice about which Bernie is ignorant. She tries to both teach him about and force him to observe a fast day called *Tish B'Av*, only to be dismayed when he leaves for work. Bernie hates that Bridget has become so Jewish and complains that the house has become a Jewish folk festival. He retaliates by co-opting elements of Catholicism—for instance, saying a prayer to St. Jude to ask that he sell a play—so Bridget will realize that, just as she does not want him to be Catholic, he does not want her to be Jewish. In this episode, then, *BLB* suggests that it is more important for the couple to stay who they each are, as individuals, rather than to mutually appropriate each other's religions. Staying who they are, however, does not mean that Bernie participates in Jewish practice or that Bridget materializes a Catholic prayer life—rather, together they create a neutral and American space to inhabit, marked by neither Jewish nor Catholic elements.

A sitcom is constructed to get easy laughs, and *BLB* did not vacillate between humor and more serious material. As is often the way with sitcoms, the stereotypes are somewhat heavy handed—while ham certainly is not kosher, Mrs. Steinberg's objections to ham are rather "old world" for a non-Orthodox Jew in 1970s New York—and not necessarily consistent with then-current behavior of the New York Jewish community.

Bridget's upper-class family is Catholic, mainly for the jokes made possible by having priests and nuns in the family, but the jokes play on stereotypes about martini-swilling upper-class WASPS rather than on whiskey-drinking, working-class Irish Catholics. These stereotypes suggest some definite cultural assumptions about the ethnic conflicts in interfaith families. When Mrs. Steinberg objects to Bridget's ham and eggs, Bridget's concern that her cooking is not Jewish enough leads her to worry that no aspect of their lives together is Jewish enough. Similarly, the concern over food, as well as the food restrictions, originates with Bernie's mother. Throughout the sitcom, the other (older) generations, both Fitzgerald and Steinberg, are the ones who have difficulties over interfaith marriage. Bridget and Bernie face no problem, except their families, that they cannot overcome with a few sentences or a kiss. Even when Bridget and Bernie do experience problems, the older generation is presented as instigating the fears, which can be cleared up as soon as the couple communicates well about them.

Jewish and Christian identities play a central role in several episodes, but importantly, the issue breaks down on generational lines. Mrs. Steinberg, not Bernie, complains about Bernie's breakfast of ham and eggs. Mrs. Steinberg, not Bernie, sees Judaism as something that is fundamental to Bernie, such that his corporeal body will rebel against non-Kosher food. For Bridget and Bernie, these heritages are part of their backgrounds, but not in the forefront of who they are. While the trope of the younger generation intermarrying as a stage in the process of assimilation while the older generation clung to their religious and cultural heritage was a standard representation of intermarriage throughout the 20th century, it had a particular relevance in the 1970s. The younger generation was intermarrying at a higher rate than ever before, with varying

estimates averaging at about 30% for the early 1970s. In part, this was because they were raised in a postwar suburban world that suggested, according to sociologists like William Herberg and Robert Bellah, that they were more alike than different because they were all American.[115] (Ethnic studies scholars point out that this was not, in fact, the case. This perception, however, formed a strong ideological current at the time.)[116] Additionally, these couples were products of the 1960s, a time that valued individualism and spiritual seeking and was inherently skeptical of institutional loyalty, whereas their parents had been formed by both the Great Depression and the Second World War.[117] Generational conflict was a mainstay of depictions of interfaith marriage, but it was also a trenchant theme for 1970s pop culture, with the classic example coming from the same primetime lineup as *BLB*, the television show *All in the Family*, which turned on the generational conflict between Archie Bunker and the daughter and son-in-law who shared his house.

If generational conflict was part and parcel of 1970s pop culture, there were also historical factors that made it particularly applicable in the representations of the interfaith family. For the Catholic and Jewish young adults whom Bridget and Bernie were purported to represent, they were the first generation to be raised in a post–World War II, Protestant–Catholic–Jewish world, who, at least broadly speaking, considered themselves to be American. Both Catholics and Jews were newly included in American life, the Catholics specifically having seen both Vatican II, which stripped away some of

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[115] Robert N. Bellah, *Beyond Belief: Essays on Religion in a Post-Traditionalist World* (University of California Press, 1991), 168–189; Will Herberg, *Protestant, Catholic, Jew: An Essay in American Religious Sociology* (Anchor Books, 1960).
[116] Prell, *Fighting to Become Americans*.
[117] Wade Clark Roof, Bruce Greer, and Mary Johnson, *A Generation of Seekers: The Spiritual Journeys of the Baby Boom Generation* (Harper San Francisco, 1994); Robert N. Bellah et al., *Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life*, 3rd ed. (University of California Press, 2007).

the Catholic practices that marked them as different from their Protestant neighbors, and the election of John F. Kennedy, which proved that a Catholic child could grow up to be President.[118] Inclusion in that Protestant American life, however, required moving away from some of the markers of Jewish and Catholic identity, markers that were as much or more located in foodways or speech patterns as in observance of fast days, prayers in Hebrew, or prayers to saints.

Their parents, however, were in a very different place. For Catholic parents, whose formative years dated before Vatican II, Catholicism felt less like an American religion than like a religion apart that nevertheless could exist in the United States. While many adult Catholics welcomed the changes of Vatican II, others resented the changes, seeing them as diluting or weakening a tradition that had been the formative structure of a distinct American subculture.[119] Elements of the parental commitment to Catholic life can be seen in *BLB* when, for instance, Bridget's father suspects that she may convert to Judaism and laments the thirteen years of Catholic school that he had provided for her.

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[118] Hasia R. Diner, *The Jews of the United States, 1654 to 2000* (University of California Press, 2006); Jay P. Dolan, *In Search of an American Catholicism: A History of Religion and Culture in Tension*, Trade. (Oxford University Press, USA, 2003); Glazer, Nathan, "Multiculuralism, Religious Conservatism, and American Diversity," in *Religion, Ethnicity, and Self-Identity: Nations in Turmoil*, ed. Martin E. Marty, Martin E. and Appleby, R. Scott, 1st ed. (Salzburg, 1997); Andrew R. Heinze, *Jews and the American Soul: Human Nature in the Twentieth Century* (Princeton University Press, 2006); Herberg, *Protestant, Catholic, Jew*; Jenna Weissman Joselit, *The Wonders of America: Reinventing Jewish Culture 1880-1950* (Picador, 2002); Mark Oppenheimer, *Knocking on Heaven's Door: American Religion in the Age of Counterculture* (Yale University Press, 2003); Jonathan D. Sarna, *American Judaism: A History* (Yale University Press, 2005); Leslie Woodcock Tentler, *Catholics and Contraception: An American History* (Cornell University Press, 2009).

[119] Dolan, *In Search of an American Catholicism*, 191–256; Oppenheimer, *Knocking on Heaven's Door*, 62–73.

At the same time that Catholic parents had different cultural attachments to the Catholic Church than did their children, the cultural shifts that made intermarriage possible also put a kind of long-denied cultural status within the grasp of Catholic parents. As a result, the social acceptability represented by Bridget's Upper East Side parents, with their desire to know the correct people and serve on the board of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, was not something that Catholic parents necessarily wanted to see their children surrender through an alliance with Jews, who, for all of their cultural mainstreaming, remained more on the edge of American culture than Catholics. There was, after all, no Jewish Camelot. Outside the Fitzgerald social climbing, questions of Catholic assimilation are absent from the light, sitcom world of *BLB*. They do, however, lurk behind the generational conflicts that shape the show, suggesting that questions about assimilation were also deeply resonant with its historical moment.

Even given the generational conflict, the take-away message of the interfaith family was, in the case of *BLB*, inherently positive. In one episode, the underlying concern of the interfaith marriage served as the focal point: the question of the religion of the children. In this episode, Mrs. Steinberg overhears Bridget and Bernie discussing a new arrival. Unaware that the couple is planning to get a dog, she gets her husband and the Fitzgeralds excited about the coming grandchild, and the potential grandparents immediately begin arguing about what religion the baby will be. In the course of the episode, it becomes clear that the new arrival is coming soon, so the grandparents decide the child is going to be adopted. They arrive in Bridget and Bernie's apartment to greet the new grandchild and find a small, sleeping black baby. Unaware that Mike is watching Otis's niece while Otis takes Bridget and Bernie to get their new puppy, the grandparents

are horrified, until Mike convinces them that the child could be a loved member of the family. They could, he argues, move beyond race and religion to simply love each other as human beings. In this message about the humanity beyond religious and racial identity, *BLB* places itself firmly in the camp of the younger generation and an idealized America, segregated by neither race nor religion.

Bridget Loves Bernie addresses social, cultural, and class differences and set up the difference between Bernie's working class roots and Bridget's wealthy parents as equally—if not more—important than their religious differences. To a certain extent, this means that the concepts of Jewish and working class are conflated, as are Catholic and wealthy. Religious faith, therefore, is bracketed at best (and perhaps even ignored), which makes the harmony of this couple relatively easy. The audience sympathizes with Bridget and Bernie as they struggle to avoid the meddling of their parents, as Bridget's parents try to include them in their high-society life and Bernie's try to increase the expression of Judaism in their home. Since American society is deeply interested in both "princess and pauper" stories and the myth of a classless society, the transgression of class lines seems natural and appropriate. Similarly, as religion in the 1970s became less about community and more about the individual,[120] it was possible for Bridget and Bernie, in contrast to the older generation, to see religion as one of the differences between them that serves to make them more attractive to each other, but that does not need to be shared or taken to excess. Indeed, at no point in the show does either member of the couple demonstrate any attachment to practices or beliefs that are depicted as Jewish or Catholic. This contrasts

[120] Bellah et al., *Habits of the Heart*; Roof, Greer, and Johnson, *A Generation of Seekers*; Robert Wuthnow, *After Heaven: Spirituality in America Since the 1950s* (University of California Press, 2000).

sharply with the form of home that is intelligible to their parents, in which traditions are maintained through the shared goals of the family and the need to accommodate other American lifestyles ends when one walks through the front door.

Little House on the Prairie: The Close of a Decade

The television series *Little House on the Prairie* reprises many of the themes that had reoccurred throughout the decade yet adds an important layer of insight. The *Little House* series portrays Christianity as having practices and material objects to which its American adherents might cling. In other cases, such as *Heartbreak Kid*, Christianity is presented as having a distinct social location based in economic and social class, but largely absent from these depictions of Christianity are religious belief and practice, material culture, and familial traditions, in spite of its forming the dominant American culture. Even in *Bridget Loves Bernie*, where the Christian family's Catholicism allows for the site gags of a family that includes a priest and a nun, the concerns of the Catholic family are largely rooted in class-consciousness rather than in religious identity. Only in *Are You There God? It's Me, Margaret* does one get a sense of Christian grandparents concerned with specifically Christian identity and even then, it is not fleshed out, but rather represented with concepts such as baptism and Sunday School. *Little House*, however, addresses both material culture, in this case artifacts such as a Christening

gown, and religious practices of Christianity as well as of Judaism, giving a more complete picture of two lived religious cultures combining in family life.[121]

Little House on the Prairie ran from 1974 to 1984 on NBC. A series created to highlight Michael Landon in the role of Charles Ingalls, or "Pa," the series was only loosely based on the young adult books by Laura Ingalls Wilder, telling the stories of her pioneer girlhood in the late nineteenth century. It was an immensely popular show, with high ratings throughout its time on the air. Rather than confine itself to themes rooted in the nineteenth century, *Little House* occasionally addressed hot-button issues of the 1970s, such as women's rights or disability rights. It was in this vein that they chose to address the question of interfaith families. Whereas seven years before, *BLB* had been removed from the air because of pressure from Jewish groups at the portrayal of interfaith marriage, in 1980 the writers of the popular *Little House* series were able to choose interfaith marriage as one of the social issues worth addressing in the show's plot lines without causing social comment. This shift in response suggests that interfaith marriage had become a more acceptable topic for mainstream television.

In season six of the series, one of the supporting characters, Nellie Olsen, finds herself struggling to run the hotel and restaurant that her mother has given her. Enter Percival Dalton, a short and scholarly looking young man from out of town who is hired as a consultant. The couple falls in love and decides to marry, at which point Percival

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[121] Colleen McDannell, *Material Christianity: Religion and Popular Culture in America* (Yale Univ Pr, 1995), 1–14.
Colleen McDannell defines material culture as artifacts, landscapes, architecture, and art and points out that paying attention to such aspects of the historical record both allows scholars to see ways in which the traditionally opposed categories of sacred and profane are, in fact, routinely scrambled in religious experience and to access the experiences of those often left out of the written historical record.

announces that he cannot be married in the church. “I’m Jewish,” he explains, and a new plot line and comedic element is introduced into the show.

The interfaith marriage is a fairly minor theme, largely centering on the disapproval of Nellie’s mother, long established in the show as an unsympathetic character, who is gossipy, controlling, and manipulative. For instance, when Mrs. Olsen is informed of Percival’s Judaism, she is at first horrified, but then reflects, “I suppose it is no worse than being short.” Similarly, in season seven, Nellie has not been feeling well for several days. Though it turns out that she is pregnant, Mrs. Olsen initially attributes Nellie’s sensitive stomach to the fact that she eats the strange “Jewish” food that she cooks for her husband, namely *matzah* and *kreplach*.

The primary conflict around the interfaith family centers around an episode entitled “Let Us Reason Together,” in which Percival’s parents come to visit and the baby is born. In this one episode, the show manages to encompass an array of themes that had been addressed in a variety of ways throughout the 1970s, including assimilation, food, generational conflict, and concern for the religious identity of the children. Both Mr. Cohen and Mrs. Olsen find the other family’s foodways unacceptable. Mr. Cohen expresses disapproval of the fact that the Olsen son, Willie, drinks milk with his meal, observing that milk and meat are not to be served together. The script element serves to highlight the difference between the families, rather than to accurately depict a misunderstanding, since Jews are well aware that non-Jews do not keep kosher. Mrs. Olsen is offended when Mr. Cohen refuses to eat the roast beef because it is not kosher, though she later bonds with Mrs. Cohen over chocolate cake. (“Is chocolate cake acceptable or is it sinful?” Mrs. Olsen asks. “Only sinful for the waistline,” Mrs. Cohen

quips. “God does not mind a sweet tooth.”) Mrs. Olsen has her own chance to disapprove when the Cohens, Daltons, and Olsens gather for Shabbat dinner at Nellie and Percival’s restaurant—walking in, she gripes that she does not want to eat Jewish food.

While the food is noted as a religious difference and while that difference is reflected in dietary practices, the meals offer a light-hearted look at difference. More serious concerns come up surrounding the issues of assimilation, with both Mrs. Olsen and Mr. Cohen expressing concerns about how the family comports themselves. Before Percival’s parents arrive, Mrs. Olsen worries about what they will look like: Will they have strange noses and beady eyes? Her husband, the kindly but henpecked Nels, reminds her that whatever Percival’s parents are like, they are their daughter’s in-laws. He admonishes her to behave herself, though she is consumed with fear that the town will discover that Percival has changed his name: He is now known as Dalton, but his last name used to be Cohen. Mrs. Olsen’s concerns are rooted in her own anti-Semitism and her desire to keep up appearances.

Mr. Cohen, however, asks what assimilation means for a relationship to Judaism and is clearly pained and troubled by his son’s decisions. In numerous moments throughout the show, ranging from the look on his face when addressed as Mr. Dalton by a townsperson, to an in-depth conversation with Percival, Mr. Cohen makes his disappointment at Percival’s assimilationist tendencies known, worrying about the survival of Judaism within the family and wondering what it implies about their own relationship: Percival’s differing life choices imply, at best, a lack of filial respect and, at worst, open rejection. This latest of the popular examples is also the first to show any concerns about assimilation. While in the end, Percival is the more sympathetic character,

and he does not value the kinds of Jewish observance that his father desires, *Little House of the Prairie* does suggest that assimilation may be problematic.

While snide remarks over meals and battles over assimilation occur throughout the episode, the imminent grandchild provides a focus for the fundamental conflict around which these skirmishes occur because the grandchild represents the continuation of one religion or the other. Mr. Cohen assumes that his grandson will be Jewish and Mrs. Olsen assumes that her grandchild will be Christian. As Mr. Cohen realizes that Percival attends church with the Olsens and gathers with them for Sunday dinner, he asks what kind of a future or Jewish life could the child expect in Walnut Grove, Minnesota? Attending church and Sunday dinners will only confuse his grandson, Mr. Cohen argues. Instead, the Shabbat dinner that they had shared with the Olsens should be the first of many, replacing the Olsen family's Sunday dinners. What kind of a Jew will he turn out to be? Percival responds in an attempt to make it clear that his child will know who he or she is, and will respect his father, just as Percival respects Mr. Cohen. Mr. Cohen is not satisfied with this explanation, and tension continues to simmer.

Mrs. Olsen, meanwhile, has similar hopes for her grandchild's religious upbringing. In an attempt to bond with Mrs. Cohen, Mrs. Olsen brings out Nellie's christening dress, which she has saved since Nellie herself was a baby. The dress provides evidence of the importance of material culture in Protestantism, a tradition often characterized exclusively in terms of its belief. The thought of Nellie in her christening dress, and of seeing Nellie's own baby in the same dress, moves Mrs. Olsen to tears. Similarly, when Mr. Cohen comments that the grandchild will have many family Shabbat dinners, Mrs. Olsen counters with the idea that they will gather often for Sunday dinner.

While Sunday dinner is not formally encoded in Christian life in the same way that Shabbat dinner is given primacy in Jewish tradition, this highlights the importance of the practice for many families. Christianity, then, is not only about assimilating to an American mainstream nor is it simply a matter of belief. Rather, Mrs. Olsen's concerns point to a tradition informed by both material culture and religious practice.

Both Mrs. Olsen and Mr. Cohen have a deep investment in their grandchild's future religious identity and demonstrate much of what is important to them in each of their traditions. Although Nellie and Percival are both upset by the families arguing, Percival is untroubled about going to church with Nellie; and, when he asks Nellie if she is upset that he hid his original name, she observes, "I married you, not your name!" They are not concerned about the religious identity of the child, allowing the Olsen and Cohen parents to broker a compromise without them. The grandparents decide that a boy will be Jewish and a girl will be Christian. The evening of the grandparental decision, Nellie and Percival, the parents to be, lie in bed laughing about the proposed solution and how silly they found the entire conversation—there was no sense that either parent had any stake in the religious upbringing of their child, Rather, they simply care about family peace. Nellie, Percival, and their parents, then, echo the generational difference reflected throughout the decade: the intermarried couple, whether or not they have children, are portrayed as unconcerned about their religious differences. The concerns and investments in religious identity are the territory of the previous generation.

In the end, with classic television closure, the babies are born, and they are just that—babies, a boy *and* a girl, a Jewish grandson for Mr. Cohen and a Christian granddaughter for Mrs. Olsen. The solution is presented as a happy one: each grandparent

gets what he or she wanted. Fundamentally, though, while the solution of twins prevents one grandparent from "winning," in no way does it resolve the tensions surrounding identity. Mr. Cohen has, all along, expressed concern that Percival has fallen away from Judaism—whatever prayers he says, he says on Sunday mornings during a Protestant worship service. He eats non-kosher meat and does not keep the Sabbath. He has not promised a shift in his life and in the life of his family because they have had a boy. Similarly, Mr. Cohen feared that Sunday dinner, after church, would confuse a Jewish grandchild. Presumably, according to the terms of the compromise, the daughter will be raised Christian. Not only does that mean that the family will continue to have Sunday dinner, but it suggests that church and Christmas will continue to be part of the Dalton family life.

The compromise, while it results in a joyous family celebration, does not offer a plan for going forward. Instead, as the show moves forward, Nellie and Percival continue as they have begun. In this way, though *Little House* was responding to a social issue of the late twentieth century, Percival, like Lenny in *Heartbreak Kid*, replicated what was, in fact, the 19th century pattern of assimilation: he married a Protestant woman and became part of her Midwestern family's life, leaving behind his Jewish, New York background.[122] While the solution that the show poses is not assimilationist in the mode of *Bridget Loves Bernie* or the *Heartbreak Kid*, neither does it fit into the multicultural model explored by chapter five. Rather, it marks out a middle ground, acknowledging

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[122] Rose, *Beloved Strangers*.
Later in the series, Nellie, Percival, and the children move back east to New York and Percival's family. At that point, however, they also leave the cast of *Little House on the Prairie*, leaving us without data as to how their religious differences are negotiated in that setting.

some ambivalence around pure assimilation and suggesting that a child might retain a religious identity, while suggesting that Percival and Nellie, as individuals, can largely make their own religious choices and can, in the end, transcend the tribalism, sentimentality, and prejudice of their parents.

A Decade of Depictions: A Nuanced but Static Picture of Intermarriage

Little House on the Prairie's foray into the familial drama surrounding intermarriage ended the decade of portrayals of interfaith marriage that began with the publication of *Are You There God? It's Me, Margaret*. While the different depictions of interfaith marriage highlight several assumptions about what went into the intermarried experience, the picture of Christian/Jewish intermarriage in the United States did not change very much throughout the decade: the focus was on the couple, not the family; they emphasized assimilation as the liberated position; and they viewed the individual's relationship to religion as more important that the religious priorities of the group, often as represented by parents. Popular depictions of intermarriage rarely focused on the children of interfaith marriages, and when they did, did so without a deep understanding of the religious challenges, opportunities, and experiences of people who grew up in religiously blended families. Even Judy Blume, who gave the most complete attention to the topic, was addressing the *absence* of organized religion in Margaret's life as much as she was the presence of the two religions in Margaret's extended family. If assimilation was the presenting face of intermarriage in 1972 with *The Heartbreak Kid*, it was still the essence of the message in 1980—*Little House on the Prairie* allows for the possibility of

the son being raised as a Jew, but as Benjamin Cohen wondered, what kind of Judaism was possible in Walnut Grove, Minnesota? Even *Bridget Loves Bernie*, in which Bridget and Bernie were both from marginalized groups in the American religious landscape, one of the primary messages of the show was that religion was, for the younger generation, about the individual and his or her needs, rather than about the expectations of the family or the needs of the religious community. This privileging of the individual represented a shift in Protestant-dominated American culture that suggested an ease and acceptability of interfaith marriage that was more dedicated to the primacy of individual commitments than were either institutional Catholicism or, as the protests made clear, institutional Judaism. This valuing of the individual foreshadowed certain aspects of multicultural interfaith families, but structured deviation from the "American norm" as something to transcend rather than something to accommodate, an aspect of interfaith life that would change in the 1990s.

While the view of popular culture throughout the 1970s did not shift dramatically over the course of the decade, it did offer a different picture of what was at stake in interfaith marriages than did religious leaders. The public face of religious debates on interfaith marriage focused on clerical responses: could or should rabbis officiate at interfaith marriages and who should make those decisions? What could the Catholic Church demand of non-Catholics before they were allowed to marry in the Church? Additionally, institutions framed intermarriage in terms of theology. Jewish leaders suggested that disaffected Protestants and Catholics who married Jews might find universal and eternal truths in Judaism. Catholic leaders worried about whether the sacrament of marriage could be guaranteed without the sacrament of reconciliation,

which was only available to Catholics. Protestant debates considered the moral autonomy of the individual in making decisions about his or her marriage. These debates all focused on how the institutions might influence the decision to intermarry and the way in which those marriages might then interact with formal religion. They strove to downplay differences between the religious groups that could not be addressed in the realm of affiliation and theology.

Popular culture, for all of its ethnic stereotypes and its perceived reputation as simplistic, presented a more complex underlying conversation than the religious establishment would like to acknowledge. Popular depictions such as *Heartbreak Kid* and *BLB* noted that class and ethnic differences divided members of interfaith families, not questions of theology, sacramental or otherwise. They suggested that religious identity and practice were not simply the purview of the individual or even the couple, but that their families had deep-seated desires and claims as well. While the occasional minister or rabbi appeared in representations of interfaith families, they were never in roles of importance—the couple and their parents, rather than religious institutions, captured the imagination of the authors and screenwriters who produced *Annie Hall, Are You There God? It's Me, Margare*t, *The Heartbreak Kid, Bridget Loves Bernie*, and *Little House on the Prairie*. Lastly, by highlighting questions around food, names, christening gowns, and teenage confidences, popular depictions brought material culture, family, and personal practice into play, broadening depictions of exactly what needed to be negotiated in interfaith family life. In doing so, they broadened and deepened the public conversation about what could happen in blended family life and perhaps more accurately depicted some of the conflicts than did the debate running through institutional conversations.

Popular depictions of interfaith family life both set the terms and provided a barometer of the American imagination as couples, extended families, and their broader communities learned what it meant to religiously blend marriages and families.

Chapter Three
One Roof, One Religion: The Campaign for a Jewish (Interfaith) Family

In its 2003–2004 season, HBO's hit series *Sex in the City* presents conversion to Judaism as a solution to the dilemmas posed by interfaith love. For the first five seasons of the show, Episcopalian Charlotte York had been the most traditional and traditionally WASPY of the series' four leading women. In season six, however, she then meets and falls in love with her divorce lawyer, the sensitive but homely Harry Greenblatt. A relationship with Harry promises fulfillment that her marriage had lacked, so when he explains that he cannot marry a non-Jew, Charlotte pursues conversion.

As Samuel Freedman commented in a review for *USA Today*, "no television show had ever presented a conversion with such visual and theological detail. Even more important is what the approving portrayal represents: a reversal of the entertainment industry's tradition of viewing Jewish identity as something to be shed in the quest to become American."[123] Following traditional Jewish conversionary practices, the rabbi rebuffs Charlotte the first two times she approaches him. She undergoes a study process with the rabbi and his wife, learning Jewish religious laws and customs, and she ultimately converts at a *mikvah*, or ritual bath. When she realizes that becoming Jewish means giving up Christmas, Charlotte holds Christmas in July, setting up her tree and her ornaments and celebrating one last time, clearly mourning a loss.

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[123] Samuel G. Freedman, "'Sex in the City' Celebrates Judaism," *USA Today*, July 17, 2003.

Certainly, in her willingness to become Jewish, Charlotte demonstrates a very different pattern of interfaith romance than is documented in chapter two or than David Zurawik traces out in *The Jews of Primetime*, in which the lined between Jew and non-Jew are sharply drawn, and can be overcome, but not crossed.

Charlotte found deep meaning in her conversion to Judaism, exerting a great deal of effort in learning blessings. Her pride in her accomplishment is evident when she first cooks a Shabbat dinner for Harry. Not only did she prepare traditional Eastern European dishes, but her beatific expression as she lights the Shabbat candles and recites the blessing in Hebrew suggests deep piety. The scene implies that while the conversion had been undertaken for Harry, Charlotte ultimately found meaning in Judaism's rituals. Though her conversion had costs (namely the loss of Christmas), Charlotte clearly found satisfaction and fulfillment in her new, Jewish life. A single-religion home was created through sincere religious conversion.

While the overt message of the storyline suggested the efficacy of conversion, the narrative also suggests fundamental tensions between religious and cultural definitions of Jewish identity, as well as an inherent gender imbalance in terms of which partner was expected to convert. Harry has different plans for the Friday night on which Charlotte cooks the Shabbat dinner. He arrives home and immediately turns on the Mets game, muting it and watching it behind Charlotte's back as she recites the candle lighting blessing. Charlotte is hurt and outraged when she discovers that he is watching the ballgame on Shabbat—less because of the sacredness of the day and more because it undermines her efforts. "I gave up Christ for you," she exclaims. "Can't you give up the Mets for me?" Harry responds that it was going to be a long life together if she continues to hold her conversion over his head. "Take out the garbage, I gave up Christ for you," he yells.

This plotline in the popular television show exposes several widespread assumptions about interfaith marriage in the early twenty-first century. Unlike the

examples from the 1970s given in the previous chapter, where interfaith families were coded largely in terms of culture, and in terms of becoming American, this chapter explores the implications of a belief based understanding of Reform Judaism for interfaith marriages.[124] Because of perceptions that most interfaith marriages were between Jewish men and Christian women, the movement's conversations about how to shape these families into Jewish families became highly gendered. In these conversations, although Judaism was largely figured as a belief system, officially sanctioned advice manuals acknowledged that Jewish culture and understandings of Jewish peoplehood were central to the identity as well. These conversations, however, overtly framed Christianity as a purely theological system, without distinctive practices. Thus, while the Reform movement pushed against a perceived need to become mainstream Christian in order to become mainstream "American," there was a similar non-recognition of the type of compromises necessary for an understanding of conversion as simply embracing new beliefs. This lack of recognition was evident in a lack of formal recognition of what Christian spouses might be giving up in creating Jewish families. Existing, born-Jewish congregants, however, often did recognize differences, complaining that these new members (be they converts or non-converted spouses raising Jewish children) diluted the "Jewish feel" of communities. The Reform framing of

[124] This belief-driven understanding of Judaism profoundly affected the Reform movement's responses to interfaith marriage but arose independently of the need to respond to interfaith marriage, in fact pre-dating the spike in Christian/Jewish marriage. For more on this understanding of Judaism as a set of beliefs, potentially even a universal set of ethical principles or beliefs, and on the inherent tensions in that understanding see: Eric L. Goldstein, *The Price of Whiteness: Jews, Race, and American Identity* (Princeton University Press, 2007), 26–30, 201–208; Sarna, *American Judaism*, 263–267, 274–282; Berman, *Speaking of Jews*, 119–167.

Judaism as a religion, to which one could efficaciously convert, or even transmit without converting, existed in tension, then, with both Jewish and Christian lived experience.

In *Sex and the City*, Charlotte approaches conversion to Judaism as a religious experience, as that was the only venue possible for a convert. Yet she discovers that while Harry wants her to "be Jewish," he does not necessarily want her to "do Jewish"—or at least not to force him to do so. Being Jewish is, for him, not tied to living an observant Jewish lifestyle. Charlotte's response emphasizes that she relates to Judaism as a religion: she notes her sacrifice of Christ, not her sacrifice of her Christmas tree. Similarly, the plotline presents Charlotte, the non-Jewish woman, giving up her traditions and her beliefs to adapt to Harry's requirements. While Charlotte is expected to sacrifice her own tradition for Harry, he does not expect to have to allow her a voice in how they were Jewish—he was unwilling to moderate his ethnic Judaism with religious observance. The show, then, underscores the tension in what it meant to be Jewish—a religious identity available through conversion and observance or something more nebulous, perhaps, cooking brisket and shopping at Zabar's, the elements of the Shabbat dinner that Harry appreciates—as well as the tension inherent in the gendered perceptions of interfaith marriage: that non-Jewish women would be willing to take on Judaism for the good of their families and relationships, but also that they would find personal fulfillment in doing so.

These early twenty-first century assumptions around interfaith marriage grew out of a series of conversations, largely within Reform Judaism, about how to deal with interfaith marriage. Having realized that they were unlikely to stem the tide of interfaith marriage, the Reform leadership set out to convince interfaith couples to create Jewish

homes, through the exclusion of Christian practice and formal affiliation with Jewish communal life whether or not those elements were accompanied by the conversion of the non-Jewish spouse. In the early 1980s, leaders in the Reform movement had compelling reasons to create a definition that rested heavily on Judaism as a religion, based in belief, education, and participation in communal life. Such a definition made it more possible both to count children of non-Jewish mothers as Jews and to argue that conversion to Judaism was a fully efficacious solution to the problem of intermarriage. While this understanding of Judaism appealed to the Reform leadership, because it could be easily defined, controlled, and transmitted, it was also often at odds with the understanding of Jewishness within families and even religious communities. Some members of Reform Jewish communities, who objected to the ways in which the presence of interfaith families changed Jewish communal life, rebuffed ”New Jews” and interfaith families. Additionally, non-Jewish women or converts sometimes struggled with a definition of Judaism that did not match those of their spouses, but taking on Jewish ritual life did not erase all of the perceived differences within the interfaith family.

These competing understandings of Judaism are evident in the Reform official and unofficial leadership’s attempts to convince interfaith families of the inherent value and fairness of choosing Judaism as a family religion. In outreach campaigns, they tackled complexities of interfaith home life, particularly how the relationship between practice and identity is tied to understandings of religion, culture, and ethnicity. Specifically, they revealed assumptions about Judaism and Christianity as "religions" and "cultures.” Both suggested that Jewish identity rested in belief and culture, while Christian identity was rooted exclusively in personal belief, a distinction that they used to

argue that interfaith families should choose Jewish lives. While outreach efforts, in the form of advice manuals for parents and picture books for children, meant to bring interfaith families into the Jewish fold and did not frame gender as a central concern, they reflected the expectation that Christian women would understand that the various imbalances between Judaism and Christianity meant that they should sacrifice their own traditions to raise Jewish children. The Reform movement's campaign to prove the value that a Christian woman could find in Jewish life and in the reasonableness of her sacrifice of her natal religion for family was successful enough that it began to appear in popular culture depictions of intermarriage by the turn of the twenty-first century, as it did in *Sex in the City*.[125]

At the same time that the Reform movement's outreach campaign placed religious Christianity in opposition to both religious and cultural Judaism, their depictions of both traditions repeatedly troubled this distinction by exploring cultural aspects of Christianity. At the same time, then, that the Reform movement's division between religion and culture was of central importance to the creation of Jewish homes out of interfaith marriages, depictions of interfaith family life demonstrate a strong fear of cultural Christianity. Essentially, outreach leaders such as authors Paul Cowan and Andrea King worried that the children would develop what social theorist Pierre Bourdieu refers to as *dispositions* drawn from Christianity. Dispositions designate "a *way of being*, a *habitual state* (especially of the body) and, in particular, a *predisposition*,

[125] For an in-depth study of the ways in which non-Jewish women are taking a leadership role in the raising of Jewish children in interfaith families, see Jennifer Thompson's ethnography of the Mother's Circle:
Jennifer Thompson, *Jewish on Their Own Terms: How Intermarried Couples Are Changing American Judaism* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2014).

tendency, *propensity*, or *inclination*."[126] By participating in Christian practice (either the formal practice of religious services or the family practices of Christmas tree and holiday cooking), children of interfaith families might develop Christian, rather than Jewish, dispositions. In short, they would feel like Christians, whether or not they believed like Christians. This fear underscored a tension between the desire to define Christianity as an exclusively creedal religion and the experience of the Jew as a minority in a Christian culture, a designation that, by its very existence, implied a range of non-creedal Christian experience.

Defining Jews: Reform Jewish Leadership and Solutions to the Interfaith Family

Over the course of the twentieth century, American Judaism largely shifted from a racial and ethnic self-understanding to a religious one. This shift was essential in the process of American assimilation that allowed, for instance, for Will Herberg to claim Judaism as an "American religion" along with Protestantism and Catholicism. In making that move, Jewish religious leaders attempted to access the power and social acceptance that Protestant Christianity had in its historical framing of itself as a creed rather than a civilization. The resistance, in Reform congregations, to including New Jews who were religiously but not ethnically assimilated into the community underscored some of the tensions in considering Judaism as an institutional religion alone. In part, the tendency to focus on overtly religious practice took from American Jews the ability to articulate their fears about intermarriage. If Judaism existed solely in religious terms and Protestants,

[126] Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (Cambridge University Press, 1977), 214.

Catholics, and Jews shared the same fundamental American values, or if a family had ceased in its religious beliefs and practice, intermarriage ceased to be a problem. Similarly, if the gentile girlfriend could, through conversion or marriage contract, be turned into a Jewish wife and mother (legally or functionally), there was no longer a cost to interfaith marriage from the standpoint of Jewish survival as long as she raised children who attended and received education from Jewish communal institutions.

In determining how to define Jewish identity, the Reform movement's leadership was motivated by a desire to incorporate interfaith families into Jewish communities. The policy debates of the Reform movement tied Jewish identity to participation in Jewish institutional life. This deliberate shift from Jewish legal and cultural definitions of Judaism derived from an attempt to address intermarriage but also contributed to a shift from "cultural" or "ethnic" Jewish identity to a "religious" or affiliation-based understanding of Jewish life in the Reform movement. That shift suggested that attendance at services and religious school could make up for the lack of an ethnic identity in the home. Additionally, the Reform movement eliminated reliance upon only matrilineal descent, allowing Reform Judaism to be passed from either parent to a child, provided that child received a Jewish education. These definitions of Jewishness did not, however, always mesh well with the membership of Jewish communities, who found that the inclusion of recent converts and interfaith families shifted the tenor of the community.

In the early 1980s, as Americans worried about rising divorce rates, Alexander Schindler, president of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations; Joseph Glaser, attorney and executive vice-president of the CCAR; and Sanford Seltzer, director of the Commission on Reform Jewish Outreach and director of Planning and Research for the

UAHC, became concerned about the Jewish future of children when interfaith marriages failed and the children ended up being raised by their non-Jewish mothers.[127] In spite of the fact that the Reform movement encouraged conversion (as seen in chapter one) and suggested that conversion was completely efficacious, these concerns demonstrated the fear that converts, particularly women who converted in conjunction with marriage, could not be trusted to maintain Jewish identity outside of that marriage. In addition, the debate about possible solutions to this problem reveals the extent to which the Reform leadership privileged institutional markers of Judaism over home life.

Although couples generally had to agree to raise their children as Jews in order to have a Jewish wedding officiated by a rabbi, some leaders in the Reform movement were concerned that the courts would not hold non-Jewish custodial parents to that commitment in the event of a divorce. The Reform movement cited studies demonstrating that two to four times as many Jewish men married Christian women as vice versa and that 50% of interfaith marriages ended in divorce.[128] Since mothers received custody in 90% of divorce cases, this meant that, by the agreement that their parents made as a condition of marriage, children who were Jewish would be raised

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[127] Sanford Seltzer, "Letter from Sanford Seltzer to Alexander M. Schindler", February 4, 1982, Mss Co 630 Box 10 Folder 5, American Jewish Archives; Joseph Glaser, Joseph, "Letter from Joseph Glaser to Alexander Schindler", April 12, 1982, Mss Co 630 Box 10 Folder 5, American Jewish Archives.

[128] Sanford Seltzer, "Intermarriage, Divorce, and the Jewish Status of Children" (Horizon Institute, Union of American Hebrew Congregations, August 1981), 2, MssCo 630 Box 10 Folder 5, American Jewish Archives.
Seltzer cites the following for these statistics: Egon Mayer, "A Cure for Intermarriage," *Moment Magazine*. June 1979. 3-4.
Edward W. Beal, "Separation, Divorce and Single Parent Families" in *The Family Life Cycle*, edited by Elizabeth A. Carter and Monica McGoldrick. (New York: Gardner Press, 1980) 241.
Allen Maller. "Jewish Gentile Divorce in California" in *Jewish Social Studies* (1975) 37:3-4. 280-290.

primarily in the homes of their non-Jewish mothers.[129] If the mother were to renege on her agreement to raise Jewish children post-divorce, these children would not be raised as Jews. Because of concerns that these children represented a significant numerical loss to American Judaism, Seltzer corresponded with other leaders in the Reform movement about Jewish identity of children being raised by their Christian mothers. Additionally, he fielded concerns from Jewish divorce lawyers working on divorces for interfaith couples and concerned about the implications of the divorce for the religious lives of the children, demonstrating that the concerns existed among some lay Jews as well.

Seltzer wrote a report for the Horizon Institute, "a center for research, policy, and planning for the UAHC and its member congregations," detailing court decisions addressing the religious upbringing of children when divorcing parents were of different religious backgrounds.[130] Seltzer provided examples of the latter, particularly two cases, from 1956 and 1962, in which lower courts ordered a Protestant mother to raise her children as Catholics and a Catholic woman to raise her children as Jews, respectively.[131] In each case, the lower courts' decisions were predicated on the agreement that the couple had made during their marriage for the religious upbringing of the children. In each case, however, the higher court overturned the decision, allowing the mother, as the custodial parent, to determine the children's religious upbringing.

In the first case, the court ruled that not only should courts generally not legislate the children's religious upbringing and rather leave that decision to the custodial parent, but also that "the courts have generally refused to enforce agreements between the father

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[129] Ibid., 1.
[130] Ibid.
[131] Ibid., 1–2.

and the mother concerning the religious training of children but have held that the parent having custody is not bound by previous contract."[132] In the second case, the court went even further, noting that to force a Catholic woman to bring her children to Jewish religious schools and services on a weekly basis "violates section 58 of the Virginia Constitution which guaranteed that no man shall be compelled to frequent or support any religious worship, place, or ministry."[133] Seltzer was particularly interested in these cases, as he believed that they had particular import for children of Christian/Jewish marriages because they meant that the UAHC and the CCAR could not count on the court system to enforce premarital commitments to raise children as Jews should the marriage dissolve.

The true test, Seltzer felt, as to whether courts could be counted on to enforce the marital agreements came with cases in which the mother had converted to Judaism but had "reverted back to her former faith" and, upon divorce, intended to raise her children as non-Jews. Seltzer argued "such cases are of profound importance, not merely in terms of the wellbeing of children subsequent to the dissolution of a marriage and the maintenance of some family stability, but in terms of the legal status of Jewish conversions in the civil courts of the United States."[134] He noted the case of *Green vs. Green*, which had not been settled at the time of his article. Mrs. Green wished, post-divorce, to return to her natal Roman Catholicism, in which she wanted to raise her children. Mr. Green argued that both her conversion certificate and their marriage

[132] Ibid., 1.
[133] Ibid., 2.
[134] Ibid., 3.

contract, including the agreement that the children be raised as Jews, should be considered legally binding contracts.[135]

Seltzer contrasted the Green case with that of the Schwarzmans. In this conflict, Mrs. Schwarzman was Roman Catholic before her marriage and agreed to convert as a condition of the marriage. Both the conversion and the wedding were Reform. Their four children were named in the synagogue. When Mrs. Schwarzman sought a divorce, however, she renounced Judaism, married a Catholic man, and intended to move forward raising the children as Catholics. Mr. Schwartzman went to court to try to guarantee that his children be raised as Jews because they had been so since birth. He cited the couple's oral agreement and their mother's conversion—making the children born of a Jewish mother—and their ritual naming in a synagogue. While he did not seek custody of the children or question his ex-wife's capability to mother them, he sought to ensure that the children be raised as Jews. Mrs. Schwarzman, in turn, responded that she had converted under duress. The court ruled in her favor, in part because of the testimony of an Orthodox rabbi, who declared her conversion invalid and therefore the children not Jewish, because of the lack of a *mikvah* [ritual bath] in her conversion.[136] Despite being the largest of the American Jewish movement, the Reform movement faced questions of legitimacy because of their approach to Jewish law.

A number of elements in both of these cases—and in the Reform concern with the cases—are of interest. Seltzer went on to suggest, for instance, that Reform decisions about ritual policy regarding conversion and patrilineal descent should be made with an eye towards how they would hold up in the secular court. As a Reform rabbi, Seltzer was

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[135] Ibid.
[136] Ibid.

deeply troubled by the secular court's decision that Mrs. Schwartzman's conversion was not valid because it met Reform rather than Orthodox standards. As a result, there was a move to consider whether there were ways to consider agreements to raise children as Jews, made during a marriage or as a condition of a Jewish marriage, legally binding. Also worth noting is that in each case that Seltzer addressed, he was concerned about marriages between Jewish men and non-Jewish (usually Christian) women. These marriages reflected two realities: the first was traditional Jewish law, which stipulated that a child must have a Jewish mother to be Jewish. If the secular courts used traditional Jewish law, they would not acknowledge children as Jewish if only their father was Jewish. Second, the focus on non-Jewish mothers indicated deep concern about the need for the mother to support the child's Jewish identity. In the case of a divorce, if the mother gained custody, as she was likely to do, she would be primarily in charge of forming her children.

It did not prove viable for the Reform movement (or any other Jewish movement) to try to compel the court system to support agreements to raise children Jewish. As they struggled with these issues, the Reform movement quickly discarded the idea of trying to legally compel non-Jewish parents to raise children as Jews. Schindler suggested that the CCAR develop a program to support the Jewishness of such children, but Donald Gluckman of the CCAR's Family Life Commission of the CCAR, opposed religious intervention in divorce cases, arguing that "all such legal means of coercion would be counterproductive" and would lead to "exceedingly complex and acrimonious family circumstances."[137] To Gluckman, such involvement by a national arm of the Reform

[137] Glaser, Joseph, "Letter from Joseph Glaser to Alexander Schindler."

movement or by the Family Life Committee would be "highly inappropriate"[138] because of the stress that it would insert into the already difficult process of divorce and the strain that it could add to the home.

Most germane to my argument, however, was that the definition of "raising a child as a Jew" was not made clear, at least in this article and in the traces of the debate left in the archival record. In the examples given, it implied that the children would be raised as Jews if they attended Jewish religious school and services on a regular basis. What is not clear is whether there was to be an absence of other religions in the home, an important consideration in many Reform rabbis' agreement to perform interfaith marriages. It is unlikely that anyone thought that a mother who was forced by a court order to raise her children as Jews (or, for that matter, in any given religion) would create a warm and vibrant Jewish home culture, thereby limiting the children's access to practices in the home. Such a responsibility would be left to the non-custodial parent and his extended family, which by definition would have less opportunity to influence the children's worldview. The exploration of interfaith divorce at the highest levels of Reform leadership did not address practice in the home as central to the formation of Jewish dispositions. Rather, they located Jewish identity instead in Jewish education and synagogue participation, goals that were theoretically possible for the non-Jewish mother raising her Jewish children, but a shift that was also in keeping with broader trends in the Reform movement.[139]

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[138] "Report of the Committee on Patrilineal Descent on the Status of Children of Mixed Marriages Adopted by the Central Conference of American Rabbis at Its 94th Annual Convention", March 15, 1983, 3, 739 Box 8 Folder 13, American Jewish Archives.

[139] Scholars have documented a post–World War II shift from Judaism as a racial or ethnic group to Judaism as a religious group. This shift, which was necessary for full

In 1983, shortly after the debate about custody and interfaith divorce, the Reform movement made another modification to its policies, largely in response to intermarriage. The Reform movement re-defined Jewishness in Jewish law. This shift had profound effects on the expectations for the interfaith family and demonstrates the types of negotiations that the leadership found necessary in response to a shifting reality. According to traditional Jewish law, Judaism is passed from mother to child. The child of a Jewish father and a non-Jewish mother, therefore, was not considered Jewish unless that child was converted. Similarly, adopted children whose birth mother was not Jewish must also convert. The Reform movement had made alterations to that law at other moments in their history, deciding in 1947 that infants or school-aged children would be considered Jews if they were raised as Jews, a decision that was aimed at children adopted into Jewish families. The same policy noted that once a child was old enough to give consent to his or her religious identity, he or she needed to convert.[140] These decisions, however, were about adoption, not about patrilineal decent. Reform leaders were willing to dispense with matrilineal descent if a child was adopted into a Jewish home with two Jewish parents. While the policy set a precedent that opened the possibility of considering children with a Jewish father and a non-Jewish mother to be Jewish, it did not actually do so.

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acceptance into American society, was at times organic and at times strategic. Thus, while focusing Jewish identity on the religious institution offered a clearly defined path to "Jewishness" for interfaith families, it was also emblematic of trends in mid-twentieth century American Judaism. For more information see:
Goldstein, *The Price of Whiteness*, 189–208; Sarna, *American Judaism*, 272–374.

[140] "Report of the Committee on Patrilineal Descent on the Status of Children of Mixed Marriages Adopted by the Central Conference of American Rabbis at Its 94th Annual Convention," 3.

A slightly different logic was espoused in the 1961 Rabbi's Manual, which noted that while Jewish law allowed children of mixed marriages to join a synagogue or marry a Jew without conversion only if their mothers were Jewish, "Reform Judaism, however, accepts such a child as Jewish without a formal conversion, if he attends a Jewish school and follows a course of studies leading to Confirmation. Such a procedure is regarded as sufficient evidence that the parents and the child himself intend that he shall live as a Jew."[141] The Rabbi's Manual, however, was not a formal statement of policy. As a result, it did not provide a definitive statement on the status of the child of a Jewish father and a non-Jewish mother.

On March 15, 1983, however, the Report of the Committee on Patrilineal Descent on the Status of Children of Mixed Marriages was adopted as policy by the Central Conference of American Rabbis at its 94th Annual Convention and radically changed understandings of Jewish descent in the Reform movement (or at least in the governing bodies of the Reform movement). The CCAR decided that, henceforth, the Reform movement would consider as Jewish any child with one Jewish parent, mother or father. "This presumption of the Jewish status of the offspring of any mixed marriage is to be established through appropriate and timely public and formal acts of identification with the Jewish faith and people," the report stipulated, before going on to note that:

> The performance of these mitzvot [commandments] serves to commit those who participate in them, both parent and child, to Jewish life. Depending on circumstances, mitzvot leading toward a positive and exclusive Jewish identity will include entry into the covenant, acquisition of a Hebrew name, Torah study, bar/bat mitzvah and Kabbalat Torah (Confirmation). For those beyond childhood claiming Jewish identity,

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[141] Ibid.

> other public acts or declarations may be added or substituted after consultation with their rabbi.[142]

Essentially, the Committee on Patrilineal Descent decided that in order to be considered Jewish, a child had to be raised in a Jewish way, outlining a set of religious practices that counted as raising the child as a Jew. Without that upbringing, a child with one Jewish parent would not be counted as a Jew, even if the Jewish parent was the mother. With the proper upbringing, the child of a Jewish father would be considered Jewish.

This move was a distinct shift from previous Reform policy not only because it implemented patrilineal descent, but also because it argued that matrilineal descent was not sufficient to make a child Jewish—education was needed as well. It also put the Reform movement in even greater tension with Conservative and Orthodox Judaism, which retained the older definitions, therefore increasing tension between the movements, at least with regard to the question of who is a Jew. This shift moved away from an ethnic to an educational model of Jewish identity. While it did not eradicate the ethnic component entirely—a Jewish parent remained necessary—for the first time in modern Jewish history, a Jewish mother was not sufficient to claim Jewish identity. The shift to an educational model also solidified an institutional focus on Jewishness: because, for the Reform movement, Jewish education became necessary to claiming Jewish status, and so did affiliation with a formal community.

The Committee on Patrilineal Descent explained the reasoning behind the decision to adapt the requirements for formal inclusion in the (Reform) Jewish community. First, they noted that the Reform movement has always tried to balance

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[142] Ibid., 4.

tradition with modernity. They also pointed to places where Jewish tradition historically and biblically did use patrilineal descent, for instance tracing the descendants of Abraham from father to son or passing the governance of Israel from David to Solomon. They also explored the rationale for matrilineal descent, assessing the ways in which it did not, in their view, apply to contemporary society.[143] Their primary motivation, however, was to address the rising intermarriage rate. "There are tens of thousands of mixed marriages," the report points out. "In a vast majority of these cases the non-Jewish extended family is a functioning part of the child's world, and may be decisive in shaping the life of the child. It can no longer be assumed a priori, therefore, that the child of a Jewish mother will be Jewish any more than that the child of a non-Jewish mother will not be."[144] In other words, the non-Jewish members of the child's family have the potential to culturally shape the child. In order to ensure that the child has an "exclusively" Jewish identity, the child needs to participate (exclusively) in institutionally sanctioned Jewish rituals. It is unclear how these rituals would mitigate the influence of the non-Jewish extended family, but they do provide clear markers of an identity. Like the concern that children living with the non-Jewish mother should be brought to Jewish services and religious school, this focus on life cycle rituals functions as a way of looking at Jewishness as formal practices and education that could be regulated by the institution. Putting primacy on those practices and affiliations allowed the cultural milieu of family and home to recede in (formal) importance.

The definition of a child's religious identity as rooted in his or her religious training rather than in a particular ethnic heritage contrasted sharply with other sets of

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[143] Ibid., 1–2.
[144] Ibid., 3.

concerns that were extant within Reform Jewish communities. As more and more non-Jews entered Jewish communal life as members of Jewish families, they changed the ethnic identity-based character of those communal organizations. Members complained to Alexander Schindler, president of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations and the initiator of the outreach programs to interfaith couples, that their synagogues and community centers, formerly places to relax from life in a gentile world, no longer provided ethnic enclaves. This concern extended to "New Jews," as converts were sometimes called.

In an attempt to mitigate such reactions, workshops on intermarriage, such as the Forum on Intermarriage and Conversion at Chicago's Spertus College of Judaica on February 7, 1982, included spaces for participants to "develop a personal response" to intermarriage and New Jews. These workshops were intended both to help people air their feelings about people who were part of the Jewish community, either by marriage or conversion, but who were not born Jewish, and explore ways to include them in communal life. Ironically, the very inclusion of these new converts—meant to welcome them into the Jewish family—created a new problem in Jewish communal life. They were sometimes seen as “intruders” by those Jews who still considered them outsiders, and they were arriving in numbers that notably changed the feel of Jewish communal life in ways that troubled a portion of those communities.[145] Thus, the Reform leadership’s definition of a Jew conflicted with the lived reality of being Jewish.

These concerns point to an ongoing debate within the Jewish world—because converts and non-Jewish spouses were not ethnically Jewish, their presence changed the

[145] Leslie Simon, “Forum on Intermarriage and Conversion: Preconference Planning,” December 14, 1981, Mss Co 630 Box 10 Folder 10, American Jewish Archives.

character of Jewish communal life. If formal Reform rhetoric, largely under the oversight of Alexander Schindler, understood conversion as an answer to the problem of intermarriage, members of congregations and families were less convinced by a purely institutionally religious understanding of what made someone Jewish. The religious answer had a certain utility, offering a potential solution to problems of intermarriage (via conversion) and divorce (via the hallmarks of institutional upbringing), but this communal discomfort underscored more culturally inflected understandings of identity.

The fact that Jewish communities pushed back against both "new Jews" and interfaith families, indicated that the understanding of Judaism as a religion, accessible through belief and practice, did not sit well with all members of the Jewish community. The new members, some members of Jewish communities argued, changed the “feel” of Jewish communal life. As Barbara Friedlander of Ohio wrote to Schindler in 1992, "I cannot find a Temple that feels 'Jewish.'…In a world where Jews are a minority, it was always comfortable to go to Temple and be with one’s own…. [I]t is comforting and familiar to be with people who share your heritage and religious beliefs, and who know what it is to be a Jew in a Christian world; a world which seems to have extended right into our Synagogues."[146] The spaces felt less Jewish and ceased to operate as minority enclaves, protected from the dominant culture. Interestingly, this discomfort existed despite the fact that conversion and often intermarriage required significant study. As a result, converts were often very knowledgeable about certain kinds of Jewish ritual life—at times more so than those born as Jews. This knowledge was not sufficient, however, to necessarily make the converts "feel Jewish" to their fellow congregants. The advice

[146] Barbara Friedlander, “Letter to Alexander M. Schindler”, September 9, 1992, Mss Co 630 Box 10 Folder 11, American Jewish Archives.

manuals did not address these experiences, and while the Reform movement tried to address them, they were not allowed to shape or determine policy.

Ironically, some converts had both more Jewish knowledge and more robust (intentional) practice than many who were born Jews. Thus, the "interfaith" family with a convert (who were no longer technically interfaith, but still to a certain degree thought of as such) was more "Jewish" by Reform Judaism official standards than born Jews who do nothing ritually. At the same time, they were still, to a certain degree, outsiders and as a result, retained a certain interfaith status despite official protests that once a conversion occurred the families were no longer interfaith. By redefining Judaism through belief as opposed to the cultural model presented in the previous chapter, or the multicultural model that will be presented in chapter five, the Reform leadership created a paradox whereby conversionary families might be both more Jewishly learned and observant without being fully accepted into the community.

Religious Manuals: Defining Jews, Complicating Families

While the Reform movement's formal policies did not manage to address cultural aspects of Judaism, by the late 1980s and early 1990s, advice manuals began to address the relationship between religious and cultural practice. As I demonstrated in my examination of popular culture in chapter three, the lines that people were able to draw between Christianity and Judaism and between religion and culture were blurry and messy at best. That did not prevent people from trying to draw boundaries, not just in institutional settings but also in private lives. While rabbis debated the role of the Reform

movement in connecting interfaith families to Judaism, couples themselves turned to advice manuals on how to navigate interfaith family life.

Two advice manuals, Paul Cowan's *Mixed Blessings: Overcoming the Stumbling Blocks to Interfaith Marriage*[147] (1987) and Andrea King's *If I'm Jewish and You're Christian, Then What Are the Kids?* (1996) were written to encourage couples to choose to maintain Jewish homes and families. [148] Both books were widely read: 80% of the couples that I interviewed in my ethnographic study of 40 families who had been in interfaith marriages during the 1980s and 1990s had read one or both of the books. Both texts are widely held in libraries and continue to be sited in work on interfaith marriage in the decades since their publication. Paul Cowan was a Jew whose marriage to a Unitarian-raised New Englander had been interfaith until his wife converted to Judaism after fifteen years of marriage. Andrea King was an Episcopalian married to a Jew and raising their son in a Jewish home. Both wrote as insiders to interfaith marriage, who had, ultimately, chosen to have Jewish homes. They also wrote from positions of authority within Jewish conversations on interfaith marriage.

By the time that Cowan wrote *Mixed Blessings,* he and his wife Rachel were prominent spokespeople for intermarriage within liberal Jewish communities. They staunchly supported intermarriage, while advocating for couples to maintain Jewish homes. In that capacity, they had led workshops on college campuses and at Jewish cultural centers such as the 92nd Street YMHA. The American Jewish Committee

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[147] Laurie F. Maffly-Kipp, Leigh E. Schmidt, and Mark Valeri, *Practicing Protestants: Histories of Christian Life in America, 1630--1965* (The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2006); David D. Hall, *Lived Religion in America: Toward A History of Practice* (Princeton University Press, 1997).

[148] Andrea King, *If I'm Jewish and You're Christian, What Are the Kids?: A Parenting Guide for Interfaith Families* (Urj Press, 1993).

sponsored the Cowans' speaking tour of six cities, and they became sought after speakers on intermarriage throughout the decade, talking at synagogues, Jewish Community Centers, and Jewish campus centers. King wrote *What Are the Kids* at the request of Lydia Kukoff, who headed outreach to interfaith couples for the Union of American Hebrew Congregations, the congregational arm of the Reform movement. The introduction to her manual was written by Alexander Schindler, president of the UAHC. Both of these manuals, then, were written by insiders from interfaith families who were writing with the authority of relationships with formal institutional affiliations and connections.

Both advice manuals argued that children would be confused and religiously troubled if they were raised with two religions. While neither manual overtly claimed Judaism as a superior religion, they both advocated for Jewish families. Additionally, both addressed some of the conflicts that could arise in an interfaith family, as a result of the differing backgrounds of the couple. The authors' understandings of religion and culture were central to their defense of a singularly Jewish interfaith home. As much as they tried to draw neat lines between religion and culture, acceptable and unacceptable practices for interfaith families, and between Christianity and Judaism, however, their depictions of interfaith family life and social realities often undermined their own distinctions.

Both manuals established a need for a single-religion household. In doing this, they identified both Christianity and Judaism as "religions," a term that they do not define, but which is revealed to be tied to holiday celebrations, specific practices, community, and morality. Each author used a combination of their own personal

experiences and their work more broadly with interfaith families in order to establish this as a necessity.

Cowan offered examples to support the necessity of a single religion in the home by demonstrating that those who lack a solid religious foundation were confused and lacking in their religious identities. He demonstrated this point with examples from his own family life as well an in-depth look at the story of a girl whom he presented as representative of the young adults he met in his travels. In arguing for the importance of a single religion in the household, Cowan pointed to two examples about his own children that led him and his wife Rachel to the conclusion that they were wrong to believe that raising their children in both of their traditions would benefit their children. First, Cowan wrote of taking their children to a Purim celebration at which their young son ran to Rachel, threw himself into her arms, and, fearful of the story's antagonist, exclaimed, "Hamon will not come for me, will he? I am only half-Jewish."[149] For the Cowan parents, this was a red flag.[150] In the fall of 2007, when Rachel spoke at a workshop for interfaith couples at a synagogue in Atlanta, Georgia, she described her thoughts at the time: "Hmm. You can't be half a religion." Her comment clearly identified Judaism, in this story, as a religion, a set of beliefs or factors different from a race or ethnicity, which could exist in fractional portions as the result of blended parentage.

The problem emerged again when, at bedtime, their daughter asked, "Mom, would it hurt your feelings if I said that I was Jewish?" The parents were concerned that

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[149] Purim is a Jewish festival that commemorates the events in the book of Esther. The celebration includes a telling of the Esther story, with much attention paid to the villain, Hamon, who wishes to have all of the Jewish people killed.

[150] Paul Cowan and Rachel Cowan, *Mixed Blessings: Overcoming the Stumbling Blocks in an Interfaith Marriage* (Penguin (Non-Classics), 1988), 24.

their daughter felt that articulating her own religious identity implied choosing one parent and therefore potentially hurting or rejecting the other. In the book, Cowan suggested that while some families do not see incidents like these as problematic, he and his wife both felt in the moment that they were worrisome and had come to believe that eliding children's questions about religion with platitudes creates a "time bomb" that will blow up later, leaving older children confused about their identities. To him, any response that might have mitigated the children's confusion would only delay the problems of a fragmented identity. They would resurface later, he contended, potentially around major life events, like the death of a parent or grandparent, a wedding, or the birth of a child, and that when the problems emerged, they would be severe. For Cowan, then, no degree of religious blending was acceptable. The child needed to be raised in one religious tradition or another.

While Cowan did not define precisely what it would mean to select a single religion, as he traced his own family's path, he demonstrated elements of their single-religion home: as the Cowans became a single-religion family, they provided their children with Jewish education, holidays, and ritual practice. He describes Hanukah and Passover as slowly coming to feel like "their holidays" and the family's Shabbat practice becoming "sanctified time."[151] The Cowan parents, both people who had grown up without strong connections to ritual practice, committed to a life marked with Jewish observance, and by Cowan's account, found deep meaning in it. Ultimately, Rachel Cowan decided that though her relationship to the idea God continued to change, it was

[151] Ibid., 26.

doing so from a decidedly Jewish place. With that realization, which her husband termed "an epiphany," Rachel Cowan converted to Judaism.

When Cowan used his own family life to suggest that one must (and can) choose one religion for an interfaith family, he, like the Reform leadership, honed in on aspects of Jewish identity that connected to specific practices that one could adopt. For Rachel, it became an identity, marked by those practices and education, to which one could convert. In this telling, Cowan suggested that because Rachel's conversion was religious in nature, it was also totally efficacious. Thus, the Cowan family defined their Judaism in terms of spirituality and religious rather than cultural identity. In order for a family to function as Jewish, then, one had to adopt a religiously observant lifestyle that left no room for the previously Christian spouse's religious practices.

Like Cowan, in *What Are the Kids*, Andrea King argued that it was best for children to have one religious identity. She based her opinion on her observations as an early childhood educator and explained that, after working with children for years and paying particular attention to children of interfaith marriages, she realized that a sense of identity was hugely important to young children. She also determined that "children who had a clear religious identity often demonstrated a level of self-esteem that seemed to be absent in children who had an ambiguous or mixed religious identity."[152] These children, she wrote, felt a strong connection to their religious communities, religious holidays, and life cycle events. In *What Are the Kids*, King formulated religious identity as a matter of making it clear to the children that they are either Christian or Jewish, a distinction that she placed largely in terms of clearly definable rituals and community.

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[152] King, *If I'm Jewish and You're Christian, What Are the Kids?*, 3.

King structured the manual around two composite families, the Graysons and the Cohens. The Grayson family, made up of a Jewish mother, a Christian father, and three children (elementary-, middle-, and high school–aged), served as King's example of a family who chose to be both Christian and Jewish, and her depiction of them underscored her valuing of formal and institutional markers of religious identity. The Graysons decided to raise their children in both traditions because it seemed unfair to ask one parent to give up holiday traditions and also because they viewed the core messages of both traditions as fundamentally the same. The Graysons attended both church and synagogue on occasion, so that the children would be familiar with both services, "when to stand up and sit down," as their father put it.[153]

King suggested that while the Graysons believed that they were raising their children in both religions, in fact, they were raising their children in neither. "Are the Grayson children truly growing up with both religions?" she asked. "They were neither baptized nor named in a Jewish ceremony, and none of them has any formal religious education."[154] In the words of the oldest child, Hannah, "I am not both, I am nothing."[155] King went on to make a clear distinction between religion and culture, race, and ethnicity. In Hannah's voice, she explained, "It is not like having a Japanese mother and an Eskimo father, so you are half Japanese and half Eskimo."[156] King does not unpack why she sees a sharp difference between combining Christianity and Judaism heritage and Japanese and Eskimo heritage, but I would suggest that she is pointing to the differences between a religious worldview, which makes specific truth claims and a

[153] Ibid., 47.
[154] Ibid., 50.
[155] Ibid., 73.
[156] Ibid.

cultural worldview, whose truth claims may be more implicit. There may also have been some sense of "chosenness" versus "givenness" Involved. While one cannot choose to not have Eskimo and Japanese genes, fundamental to King's argument, and in direct contrast to the next chapter's multiculturalists, is the idea that Christian and Jewish identities *can* be chosen, at least by parents. It may be inevitable to have to be both Eskimo and Japanese. Being Christian and Jewish is not, King argues, inevitable.

Whether or not King is concerned with religious truth claims specifically, she used the composite children in the Grayson family to suggest that while the parents believed that raising the children in two religions worked well for the family, it in fact did not. While the parents believed that they were giving the children the best of both traditions and a strong moral framework, King maintained that they were wrong. Again, she used the voice of Hannah, the oldest Grayson child, to critique her parents' methods:

> You know, my parents are really proud that they raised us in both religions…. But I don't buy it. We have extra holidays but nothing else. It seems to me that a religion should help you deal with difficult situations, but I never got any consistent Jewish or Christian information on morality or anything like that…. I wish I had a religion that I grew up with. I'd like to have a religion that is like a hometown—something that you can think about and know that it is yours.[157]

Hannah's example points to a difference between a collection of traditions that a family might maintain and membership in a community with a shared history and set of messages. Additionally, Hannah pointed out that while her parents offered them a dual set of holidays, as neither of them were particularly interested in religion, they did not invest time in teaching their children about both religions. As much as this understanding

[157] Ibid., 72–73.

supports Judaism as a “religion” defined as “information on morality,” the word “hometown” undermined that perspective, implying an identity to which one is born rather than a religion to which one could convert. Therefore, Hannah felt that while her parents had decided on embracing both religions in order to be fair, in the end they were being fair to themselves by refusing to choose a tradition, but not fair to their children. Certainly, in this view, they were leaving their children without a religiously grounded moral framework or emotional touchstone.

King's critique of the Grayson method demonstrates how she overtly viewed Christian and Jewish identity as rooted in religious education and traditional observance within a community context. Importantly, she was drawing a sharp line between religious differences and cultural differences. Both Cowan and King stress the importance of having one religion for a family, arguing that religion, unlike culture or ethnicity, cannot be blended. While neither delves deeply into questions of contradictory truth claims, it seems reasonable to assume that those concerns are a piece of why religions cannot be combined, in their views.

Having established that it would be best for the children if the interfaith marriage did not produce an interfaith family, but rather a single-religion family, both authors set out to make the case that the resulting family should be Jewish rather than Christian. Rather than making that argument from a "statistical" standpoint, one that worried about the numerical impact of intermarriage on Judaism, Cowan and King both examined why a Jewish family would be best for the family itself, attempting to sway people concerned with their own individual families, rather than with questions of Jewish survival. In order to support the importance of selecting Judaism over Christianity, both authors drew on

distinctions between concepts of religion and culture, in order to play up the cultural aspects of Judaism, despite having made the single religion case by emphasizing religion over culture. As the cultural aspect of Judaism was played up, the authors, Cowan in particular, downplayed cultural aspects of Christianity. His depiction of Christianity, however, pointed to a number of aspects of Christian practices that were not directly rooted in theology, resting the issue not so much in Judaism as a religion and a culture versus Christianity, which was just a religion, as in the appeal of a minority culture rather than the majority culture.

Cowan argued that interfaith couples should choose to maintain Jewish homes because "Judaism and Christianity live and interact asymmetrically" on theological, cultural, and psychological levels.[158] Theologically, according to Cowan, because Christians believe in the Old Testament: "When Christians worship with Jews, there is almost nothing they cannot affirm…. They [may feel that Jesus is missing] but they can participate fully without reservation in the liturgical life of the synagogue, Holy Day rituals, even family rituals."[159] This is not, he goes on to point out, the experience of Jews worshiping with Christians, who find that "almost nothing is accessible, almost everything is problematic."[160] Not only are New Testament readings problematic for Jews, so were the re-interpretation of the Hebrew Scriptures in light of the teachings of

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[158] Cowan and Cowan, *Mixed Blessings*, 32.
In making this argument, Cowan drew heavily from the Reverend Ronald Osborne, Episcopal priest and University of Iowa chaplain. Osborne's article appeared in the September 1985 issue of the Episcopal journal *Plumbline*. While for my analysis, Cowan's argument is more important, because it has been more widely read, it is valuable to note that some Christians shared the idea of cultural asymmetry between Christians and Jews and held that therefore interfaith couples should raise their children as Jews.
[159] Osborne, quoted in Ibid., 32.
[160] Ibid., 33.

the New Testament. Cowan does not address whether the failure to read Hebrew Scriptures in light of the New Testament would make those shared texts inaccessible to Christians—rather, by focusing on the shared nature of the Scriptures themselves.

Cultural asymmetry existed between Christians and Jews because, according to Cowan, Judaism is both a religion and a people. As Cowan put it, there are many people who consider themselves ethnically Jewish "even though they have no palpable religious commitment," a concept that can be supported by Jewish religious teaching.[161] By contrast, theologically, ethnic Christianity does not exist. Rather than being Christian because one's mother was a Christian, "[o] ne is a Christian because one has been baptized and seeks to live out the meaning of the baptismal covenant."[162] Christianity thus becomes, for Cowan, solely a theological force, whose traditions and history carry no importance because they are not re-inscribed by Christian theological traditions. The traditions of Judaism, which Cowan rooted in Jewish religious thought, therefore should take greater weight in the deliberations of interfaith couples.

In this formulation, psychological asymmetry was located in the historical relationship between Judaism and Christianity and the contemporary experience of living in a minority culture versus living in a majority culture. Because the history of Jewish-Christian relations is largely one of religiously motivated oppression of Jews by Christians, according to Cowan, contemporary Jews often felt that they were betraying their history and their people by participating in Christian religious ceremonies and celebrations. Similarly, because Christian expressions dominate American culture, it underscored Jewish difference and outsider status in their own country. Contemporary

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[161] Ibid.
[162] Ibid.

American Christians, as members of the dominant group, were not only free to find Jewish rituals enhancing rather than threatening, but also often did not see Jews as a member of a minority. Rather, they saw them as other Americans and therefore did not anticipate or understand Jewish emotional reactions to Christian dominance. These issues were particularly fraught for those who understood the popular messages, explored in the previous chapter, that assimilation to the American mainstream meant some version of a Christian culture. Because of these three imbalances, Cowan argued that interfaith families functioned best as Jewish families. If the Christian spouse was a person of faith, she would be able to subscribe to all parts of her children's religious education, even if she personally believed in Jesus. If neither partner was a person of faith, the Jew still had a culture to impart whereas the Christian did not. Lastly, the Christian partner could comfortably inhabit Judaism, while the Jew could not be at ease in a Christian setting.

Cowan explained that while this cultural asymmetry was fundamental to the experiences that Christians and Jews brought to interfaith marriage, they did not realize these basic differences. As a result, problems occurred, often around the "December Dilemma" or the debate about how to navigate Christmas and Hanukkah. Jewish partners found themselves unwilling to have a Christmas tree in the house, but also felt guilty since they wanted to be fair and knew that the Christian partner embraced Jewish traditions. No matter how clearly they understood that "the tree and the cross above the altar of the hometown church are part of a Yuletide experience that is filled with happy memories," those same elements "make them feel like aliens in Christian America."[163]

[163] Ibid.

That said, the strength of their own reactions often surprised them. Cowan argued that it was their ethnic identity as a marginalized people that made the Jewish partners in interfaith marriage unable to participate in Christmas festivities with the enjoyment that their Christian spouses found in Jewish ritual life.

According to Cowan's experiences with interfaith couples, in these situations the Christian partner often understood the Jewish partner as "stubborn." They saw their Jewish partner as equal Americans rather than as part of an oppressed and "self-conscious minority group," and therefore expected them to have interior worlds similar to their own. Because they expected Jewish holidays to "enrich their lives, not threaten their identities," they neither saw their holidays as potentially threatening to the Jewish spouse nor could they understand why their Jewish partner was not as accepting of Christian holidays as they were of Jewish ones. They would not necessarily see Christianity as theologically alien and ethnically threatening to their spouses, triggering for the Jewish partners a sense of being a cultural outsider as well as a stronger identification with Jews who have been persecuted by Christians.

Setting up the idea of cultural asymmetry did very particular work for Cowan's argument: it provided personal sets of reasons for the couple of chose a Jewish family life. King and Cowan understood the argument that choosing to follow both traditions was the fair path, as it did not privilege one spouse's heritage over the other. They suggested, however, that such a framing presupposed that Christianity and Judaism were equivalent and failed to take cultural asymmetry into account. Cultural asymmetry allowed Cowan to suggest that in fact a Jewish home was the more fair and healthy option, because it allowed both partners to have a religious life that they would find

enhancing and enjoyable. In order to make such an argument, however, he had to downplay cultural aspects of Christian identity, so as to minimize the potential loss for the Christian spouse. Cowan's argument did not include a specifically gendered component, though as his own marriage, in which his Unitarian wife took on Jewish practices and eventually converted, served as his primary example and therefore further modeled the culturally Christian woman who sacrificed her own traditions to find meaning in Jewish practice.

Andrea King used her own experiences to make a similar argument about Jewish households being more successful because Christianity was a private set of beliefs while Judaism was a culture. Episcopalian King and her Jewish husband selected Judaism for much the same reasons that Cowan delineated—King's husband wanted his child to identify as a Jew and was uncomfortable with the thought of a Christian family. King "felt that the Jewish worldview, with its emphasis on justice, freedom, and responsible action, would provide a solid moral foundation for raising a child."[164] She also found it acceptable that her child would not be Christian because she saw Christianity as a "private religious creed" and felt "no compelling need to bequeath [it] to [her] child."[165] Though reluctant, her husband rejoined organized Jewish life after their child was born, while King ceased to celebrate Christian holidays in her home, later telling her son that she celebrated Christmas privately, in her heart.

King's view of religion in her own interfaith family was deeply ecumenical and individual. Not only was she able to see Judaism as enriching to her own life, but she also considered her beliefs about Christianity so personal as to feel no need to transmit them

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[164] King, *If I'm Jewish and You're Christian, What Are the Kids?*, 3. Ibid., 3.
[165] Ibid., 25.

to her child. This version of Christianity, as a personal faith whose traditions one could sacrifice in the interests of family harmony, resonates throughout her advice manual. In this way, Christianity, which King refers to as her religion, is constructed exclusively as personal belief. One can be a Christian without participation in community or ritual. It is also deeply ecumenical, in that King's belief does not make such strong truth claims that she feels a need to share them with her child. Though King associated Christianity with beliefs, she did not explicate the nature of her ecumenism. While there are a number of Christian approaches to the idea of salvation apart from faith in Christ, King does not detail how she reconciled any theological understandings of concepts such as salvation or baptism with raising her son outside of the Church, a move that results in a depiction of Christianity simply as a set of personal tastes, rather than as a robust theological system.

King was not unaware that there would be sacrifices for the Christian parent in such a family structure, and she outlined some of them through the couple in her second composite family, the Cohens, who chose to raise their children as Jews. They selected Judaism despite the fact that the Jewish husband is portrayed as understanding Judaism as an identity that was not necessarily religious: "I wasn't sure that I wanted my children to have a religious background," Sam explains, "but I knew I wanted them to be Jewish."[166] He was not particularly interested in joining a temple, and only did so because, since he had married a non-Jew, they felt they needed to make an effort to provide the children with a strong Jewish environment.[167] Kathy, by contrast, had a strong connection to Christian religious identity. She continued to belong to a church for several years after they were married and, in small ways, continued her Christian practice. She noted that

[166] Ibid., 27.
[167] Ibid., 24.

she kept a small live Christmas tree on their porch, though Sam noted that it made him uncomfortable, and when the tree died, he asked her not to replace it. Sam's discomfort with Christianity and Kathy's belief that Judaism could provide her children with "meaningful traditions, holidays, ceremonies" and to feel that they "belonged to a religious community"[168] led the couple to decide that their family would be Jewish.

Being a Jewish family for the Cohen parents meant including specific Jewish home rituals, engaging with the local Jewish community, and creating a sense of connection to the Jewish people. As King framed it through Sam, "I want the boys to appreciate their cultural heritage, to know about Jewish ideas and history, to feel a part of that. Since we don't live in a Jewish neighborhood, we're active in the temple. It gives the boys a sense of Jewish community. We also do many things to introduce them to Jewish traditions at home."[169] Jewish identity was marked by the inclusion of specific ritual acts such as circumcision for their sons and some Shabbat practice.

In addition, "I had to face the fact that raising the kids as Jews meant giving up my traditions and adopting Sam's," Kathy, the "composite" mother, explained. "Since we wanted our kids to understand fully that they were Jewish, they had to live in a Jewish home. That meant no baptisms, no Christmas tree, no Easter eggs. I knew that we would not succeed in raising our children Jewish if I observed a different set of rituals and holidays than they did."[170] It also meant that she had to understand "that my kids would be different from me. It meant that there are things that I had been brought up with that I would never share with my kids." She had to "think about that for a long time before

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[168] Ibid., 25.
[169] King, 42.
[170] King, 25.

[she] could get comfortable with that idea,"[171] but in the end she did. Kathy remembered some initial sadness at giving up her traditions, noting that it had been particularly hard to give up her Christmas ornaments. She got over her sorrow, though, and was able to take joy in visiting her ornaments where they hung on her sister's tree. In this family, what it meant to select a religion was exactly that, to choose one set of religious practices to employ. For Kathy, that meant the substitution of one religious community and set of religious practices for another, but the loss that she experienced was not depicted as causing any resentment, and it provided the children with a depth of religious community that both parents valued.

While the couple pointed to their solution as a compromise, with Sam taking on more Jewish practice than he might have preferred, his discomfort over Kathy's tree was seen as a reason not to replace the tree, whereas her sadness over the loss of Christmas and raising her children without her own traditions were losses that she was depicted as accepting. Like Cowan, King did not address the gendered aspects of her example, but in her "successful" interfaith family, she portrayed a woman who was willing to sacrifice her own traditions to prevent her husband's discomfort and because she felt it would be best for her children. The fact that such a sacrifice comes from the mother in any given example may not be significant and may simply reflect Cowan and King's personal experiences. Taken together, however, they depict a traditional picture of a women's self-sacrifice for the good of her family.

While portraying Judaism as a civilization and Christianity as a creed gave Cowan and King a trump card for creating Jewish interfaith families, they were also simply re-

[171] Seltzer, "Intermarriage, Divorce, and the Jewish Status of Children," 1.

inscribing conventional wisdom that linked Christian expression to its faith claims alone. This view of the two religions had a set archeology that enforced the idea that Judaism was an all-encompassing civilization while Christianity was a religion or creed. While these understandings of Christianity and Judaism animate Cowan and King's work, they actually flip the power imbalance, arguing that in a secular world, Christianity's theology is meaningless, whereas the cultural and ethnic aspects of Judaism's civilization remain worth preserving.

Though seeing Judaism as a civilization and Christianity as a faith has had a long history, it was not necessarily an accurate view, failing to completely describe the multiple dimensions of Christian life. Both Cowan and King's treatment of Christmas reveal the ways in which non-theological practices shaped Christian experience and had the potential to shape interfaith family life, despite the authors' claims. The question of the Christmas tree served as a litmus test in debates about whether an interfaith family was "Jewish enough." For instance, often, when an interfaith couple promised to maintain a Jewish home as a condition of having a Jewish wedding, the rabbi required that they promised not to observe Christmas at home. As already noted, Cowan supported this experience, using cultural asymmetry to suggest that a tree in the living room could make a Jew feel like an alien in his own home.[172] In his description of Jewish spouses celebrating Christmas with their future in-laws, Cowan wrote "They realize that they may be about to marry into a *religious culture* which could make their children feel Christian, not Jewish."[173] The key phrase to pick up on here is the idea of a "religious culture" that would create Christian children. The concern is not necessarily that the children would

[172] Cowan and Cowan, *Mixed Blessings*, 33.
[173] Ibid. Italics added for emphasis.

accept Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior; after all, the Christian partner in this scenario is not depicted as having a strong creedal attachment.

The idea of Christian culture, rather than creedal Christianity, when combined with understandings about the transmission of culture complicated some of the solutions for negotiating Jewish identity formation in the interfaith family setting. As noted earlier, one marker of a Jewish home, noted when couples were arranging to be married by a rabbi, was to forgo Christmas in their own homes. Rabbis and other Jewish communal leaders suggested that interfaith families celebrate the holiday with Christian family members instead. King's advice manual demonstrated this approach. When the Cohen family decided to be Jews, that decision did not mean entirely rejecting either Kathy's tradition or her family.

King did not interrogate what it meant to participate in family rituals from outside of the tradition. Rather, she suggests that linguistic separations would serve to establish separation between the Jewish children and the Christian practice. As their younger son, Zeke, explained:

> I like Christmas at Grandma and Grandpa's house…. They have a Christmas tree, and we get presents, and Mom takes presents for everyone, even though it is not our holiday. Mom said it's like when we went to my friend Tai Wong's house for Chinese New Year. We can go to his house and help him celebrate his holiday, even if it is not ours.[174]

In the Cohen family, there were clear demarcations of identity that even the children could articulate. As Zeke put it, we help them celebrate, but it is not ours. The issue at hand, for the Cohens, is related to practice; when they celebrate Christmas, they do so

[174] King, 43-44.

away from home, as guests of their grandparents. King essentially argued that the children could anticipate an annual ritual of Christmas, in a family setting, without it shaping their religious identity any more than sharing a friend's tradition, such as Chinese New Year, would. This was achieved by making linguistic distinctions, such as "we help [them] celebrate" and "it is not our holiday." These markers are ways of noting that participation in the ritual of a family Christmas celebration does not make the family Christian. This approach to the celebration of Christmas as "someone else's holiday" stands in sharp contrast to a number of children's books explored in the next chapter, which frame celebrating holidays with both families as part of the child's identity.

Despite the family's careful planning, one cannot predict ahead of time how interacting with a familial Christmas will impact the Cohen children, nor whether the framing that the parents provided will shape those effects. In short, there is no guarantee that the Cohen parents' depictions of Christmas as "grandma and grandpa's holiday" will prevent the kinds of "happy Yuletide memories" that Cowan attributes to the Christian spouses who do not want to give up the cultural, if not creedal, aspects of their childhood religious culture. While the text names Christianity as a set of potentially private beliefs, what the formerly Christian spouses recalled were the practices of their Christian lives.[175] When their children spend a holiday with their Christian grandparents, they too are participating in the practices even if the practices are not explicitly tied to a Christian theological system.

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[175] This framing of Christianity as rooted in belief combined with memories of Christian practice is not surprising, given a Protestant tendency to overlook practice in favor of belief, despite the presence of both in the lives of Protestants.
Maffly-Kipp, Schmidt, and Valeri, *Practicing Protestants*; Hall, *Lived Religion in America*; McDannell, *Material Christianity*.

Telling the children that Christmas is not "their holiday," does not guarantee that its practices will not produce dispositions, for as Bourdieu points out, Even then,

> It is necessary to abandon all theories which explicitly or implicitly treat practice as a mechanical reaction, directly determined by the antecedent conditions and entirely reducible to the mechanical functioning of pre-established assemblies….But rejection of mechanistic theories in no way implies that…we should bestow on some creative free will the free and willful power to constitute, on the instant, the meaning of the situation by projecting the ends aiming at its transformation and that we should reduce the objective intentions and constituted significations of actions or works to the conscious and deliberate intentions of their authors.

Bourdieu makes the point that the practices shape habitus (an individual's field of cultural play), but that one cannot guarantee how the practices will shape the individual. Therefore, an interfaith couple raising Jewish children cannot guarantee that, by framing Christmas as *other*, the children will experience it as other.

If King complicates the idea of Christianity as solely theology with her depiction of Christian practice, both as the aspect of her life that the composite character Kathy misses and as an experience that the Cohen children share with their grandparents, Cowan does so with his discussion of the utility of "ethno" therapy for interfaith couples. Ethnotherapy was a model of family therapy developed by Dr. Price Cobb, a psychiatrist, whose assistant, Dr. Judith Weinstein Klein, adapted it for use among Jews. The American Jewish Committee, in the hands of Irving Levine and Joseph Giordano, promoted this technique, a form of group or family therapy designed to help meet the needs of a minority group.

Central to the ethno-therapy model of family counseling is helping people understand that what they experience as interpersonal conflicts are rooted in the fact that

emotional experiences are not universal, but rather culturally conditioned. Couples with different cultural backgrounds, ethnotherapy argues, may react in ways that are emotionally puzzling to their spouses, because of their different backgrounds. The purpose of ethnotherapy, in Cowan's words, is to "remind people that religious and ethnic differences are inevitable, not shameful." Thus, he explains:

> When people from different cultural backgrounds fall in love, rejoice together and grieve together, raise children together, they aren't doing so as undifferentiated white bread Americans, but as men and women whose responses to issues as major as life and death, as minor as food or the best way to spend leisure time, have been influenced by their cultural heritages.[176]

He notes that couples who came to their workshops often thought that they had incompatible styles for human interaction when in fact they were experiencing cultural differences in their marriages. He draws many examples from his own marriage, saying that while political differences about Zionism or overt questions of faith life came up rarely, "Our tensions over household details recurred so often that we sometimes wondered whether our marriage could survive them."[177] These tensions, Cowan argued, were rooted in the fact that though both were American, he and his wife, as a Jew and a WASP, were not only religiously different, but also from very different cultural backgrounds. While the differences that Cowan traced out were rooted in deeply held stereotypes about both WASPs and Jews, their derivation was less important than the fact that Cowan, and perhaps his wife and co-author Rachel, believed these traits both shaped their marriage and were tied to their respective backgrounds.

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[176] Cowan and Cowan, *Mixed Blessings*, 129.
[177] Cowan, 19.

Cowan acknowledges that the late sixties and early seventies were times of a great deal of change in the structure of marriage. Having allowed for tensions caused by gender differences, he articulates some of the specifics that he believes to have been culturally rooted in differences between Jewish and Christian habitus. He explained that he worked at home, while his wife worked in an office. "I felt abandoned," he wrote, "when she did not call during the day. She felt smothered when I called her often."[178] Their attitudes toward child care and grocery shopping reflected differences as well. Cowan believed that sick children should be coddled while his wife worried that he was "infecting them with [his] hypochondria."[179] When grocery shopping, she thought him wasteful, he thought her stingy. Perhaps most difficult were the different styles that they had of negotiating and arguing. Cowan came from a "very talkative Jewish family," his wife from a "reserved Protestant one."[180] He describes arguments thus:

> I argue melodramatically, exaggerating to make my point, trying to drag Rachel's feelings out of her. But what I see as a natural, heated conversation threatens her with obliteration. I think I am expressing my emotions --she thinks I am bullying her. When she withdraws or begins to cry, I feel terrible because I've been raised to think that reserved people are calmer and wiser than I am…. So I try to heal the wound I've inflicted, hovering over Rachel, asking her how she is. I punish her with words. She punishes me with silences.[181]

The Cowans found a way to negotiate their different approaches that made their marriage work. When, several years after having children, they decided to make their home explicitly Jewish, they joined a religious community and took on various Jewish

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[178] Cowan, 19-20.
[179] Cowan, 20.
[180] Ibid.
[181] Ibid.

practices. Even when Rachel Cowan converted to Judaism and eventually decided to become a rabbi, however, her style of argument did not change. Cowan notes that, now, in the middle of a fight, they can "pause…and laugh at these familiar differences."[182] Those differences continue to exist.

The differences that Cowan pointed out were redolent with the kind of stereotypes that define popular depictions—understandings of Jews as loud and emotional, WASPS as emotionally distant and painfully reserved. Cowan did not explore the ways in which these typologies might intersect with individual personalities; rather, he presents ethnotherapy as a way of seeing marital differences as rooted in culture rather than in personality. But he did not play out the logical extension of his argument: if ethnic differences are fundamental to what it is to be a Christian or a Jew, then how can the religious conversion of a spouse be effective in resolving marital differences?

Conclusion

Through the course of this project, I have been told the same joke, in interviews, but also in the mingling after formal presentations: A young Jewish man goes off to college. "Have a wonderful time," his father says. "Experience life! Just do not marry a shiksa!" At some point, the young man comes home and says, "Dad, I love college. And I have met a wonderful woman. She isn't Jewish, but she says that she will convert. So it is okay, isn't it?" The father loves his son, and the young woman is willing to convert, so what can he do? He says okay. A few years later, the young couple has returned to live in

[182] Ibid.

the husband's hometown and one day his father calls him. "Son, I just got the most amazing seats for the game this Friday night. I'll pick you up at 7." "Dad, I can't go to a game on a Friday night. It is Shabbat—we have people coming for dinner." To which his father responds, "Son, I told you not to marry a shiksa!" This joke, just like Charlotte's banning of the Mets' game from her Shabbat dinner, underscores a common perception of interfaith marriage: a non-Jewish woman will agree to raise Jewish children, but she will insist, with the fervor of a convert, that they be far more observant than the husband or his family would have been otherwise. To a certain extent, this dynamic was rooted in the framing of Judaism as a religion to which one could convert and adopt through taking on set Jewish practices, an attitude espoused by the Reform leadership, but not necessarily by members of Reform communities. In this sense, then, non-Jewish women who became Jewish (or agreed to raise Jewish children) did so with an understanding of Jewishness that did not necessarily match the expectations of their spouses. Also, because of the tightly prescribed descriptions given of Judaism and Christianity, despite their best efforts to the contrary, they could not help but bring elements of Christian disposition into their homes.

The official position of the Reform movement and the position articulated by advice manuals produced in concert with the Reform leadership spelled out concerns both about the religious fate of the children of interfaith marriage and about Jewish survival and thus argued that such families should choose one religion, Judaism, for their households. The ability to do so, or even to define what made someone Jewish, remained fluid even in discussions about how to create such families. Increasingly, Jewish identity was defined according to institutional involvement, for instance, participation in Jewish

education or religious services. Additionally, families were encouraged to incorporate some Jewish practice into their home lives. Jewish identity, however, was as marked by the *absence* of Christian practice in the home as it was by the *presence* of Jewish practice.

Religion, culture, and ethnicity were unstable terms in the debates about interfaith marriage. In the 1980s and early 1990s, among those who wanted to argue that it was both possible and desirable for an interfaith marriage to result in a Jewish home, two competing definitions of Judaism held strong currency: On the one hand, it made sense to establish Judaism as both a religion (implicitly defined by Cowan and King as a system of beliefs and a defined set of practices, located largely in synagogues, but also including Shabbat dinner and sometimes kashrut) and as a culture (implicitly defined as membership in the Jewish people with a sense of European Jewish history and marginalization within the broader culture) and to contrast that definition with one of Christianity as based exclusively in belief. Those definitions allowed for the construction of compelling arguments for choosing Judaism as the household religion.

At the same time that one line of argument fused Jewish religion and Jewish culture, the Reform movement had compelling reasons to create a definition that rested heavily on Judaism as rooted in participation in Jewish communal life. Both of these arguments had internal inconsistencies and created tensions in other aspects of the Jewish community. Nevertheless, they were definitions that served a particular need: a way to expand Judaism to include the intermarried, but with very specific, and often ideologically driven, definitions of what an "intermarried" household should look like.

These definitions, however, did not incorporate the full range of interfaith family discourse, even for people who chose Jewish affiliation for their families. Patrilineally Jewish children of intermarriage were accepted by the Reform and Reconstructionist movements, but not by other branches of Judaism, destabilizing strong Jewish identity among those who might cross movements. Jewishly affiliated interfaith families barred Christian practices from their homes, but created family traditions that involved celebrating those banned holidays with other family members. While Christian practices were removed from the home, they were not removed from the familial experience of the children. In effect, then, the understandings of Judaism and Christianity articulated in the Reform leadership's attempts to address interfaith marriage were strategic, designed to encourage Jewish homes, but were not necessarily descriptive of lived experiences, either of Jewish or Christian identity or practice.

In the following chapter, I will explore a kind of "third way" in which families of interfaith couples understand themselves and negotiate these complex waters of belief, ritual, and culture: the concept of multiculturalism. This concept stands in contrast to the attempt to create a homogenous religious culture explored here and one that regards some of the blending exposed by the advice manuals as inevitable. Together, the modes of exploring interfaith family life explored in this chapter and in the next mark the dominant conversations about Christian/Jewish interfaith family life at the turn of the millennium in the United States.

Chapter Four
Chrismukkah:
Millennial Multiculturalism

A 1983 Family Circus comic strip depicts Billy, the oldest of the children, coming in the front door to announce, "Arnold Roth is lucky. His mommy is Christmas and his Daddy is Hanukkah." The caption of the one-panel strip draws its humor from the presumed childlike sense that to have two religions is lucky, a view tied to the fun, festivities, and presents that the interfaith friend no doubt enjoys. The material culture of the holidays, the food, the decorations, and, almost certainly, the opportunity to receive extra presents informs the idea that having both holidays is lucky, with no concern, at least for little Billy, about potential incompatibilities between Christianity and Judaism.[183] The appeal of the dual holidays, for Billy, is presumed to be the presents that result, and the holidays are mapped onto the identities of Arnold's parents. They are not Christian and Jewish, they are the practices, the experiences of Christmas and Hanukkah: the cookies, the latkes, the songs, the stories, the presents. The cartoon raises the question: if Arnold's mother is Christmas and his father Hanukkah, what is Arnold? Will participating in both of those events, with all of their associated celebration and consumption, create an Arnold who is, in fact, both Christmas and Hanukkah?

Two social shifts of the second half of the twentieth century, the development of a seeker mode of religion and the rise of multiculturalism, both intersected with a consumer-based mode of identity formation to create, by the end of the century, new possibilities for interfaith families who sought to combine Christian and Jewish practices

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[183] The Best Chrismukkah Ever" 2003 episode of *The OC*. (Warner Brothers, 2003-2007; Warner Home Video 2004, DVD)

in the home. Specifically, seeker religion made it more possible to shift between religious traditions and to combine practices from multiple religious traditions, a religious reality that was deeply shaped through consumption. Through multiculturalism, individuals and families could, largely through consumption, participate in practices that shaped or underscored their connections to select ethnicities at times over and above any single belief system. For interfaith families, these two trends allowed them to draw selectively from their Christian and Jewish backgrounds in order to create a mosaic of household practices that formed new, hybrid identities. Both the Christian and Jewish practices and objects consumed and the acts of consumption, themselves forms of practice, were formed and were in turn re-formed by interfaith families' blended Christian/Jewish multicultural identities.

These new multicultural interfaith families made sharp distinctions between Christianity and Judaism as religious traditions, which they defined as subscribing to "official" theologies or formally affiliating with communities and what they termed "culture" or "traditions," such as practices of food, storytelling, and home-based ritual. This rhetorical distinction between religion and culture allowed interfaith families to move the conversation away from competing truth claims and religious affiliations and .towards a multicultural approach to identity that was increasingly popular in the 1990s. At the same time, as much as the multicultural interfaith families depended on painting their practices as ethnic or cultural, their constellations of practices created a moral system that was connected to other dominant trends in late twentieth century America as well as carrying emotionally evocative meaning.

Millennial Multiculturalism and High Rates of Interfaith Marriage

The decades on either side of the millennium were characterized by high rates of intermarriage and an increased flexibility around both ethnic identity and certain kinds of religious practice. Together, these cultural shifts created spaces for blended families whose family practice drew from both Christianity and Judaism. As Robert Putnam and David Campbell point out, in the 1990s, 50% of all American marriages began as interfaith marriages, with 30% of the marriages remaining mixed and 20% becoming religiously homogenous through conversion or the selection of a third religion.[184] More particularly, they note that over 50% of American Jews entered into interfaith marriages, about half of which remained interfaith.[185] Perhaps because these marriages remained a controversial issue, particularly in the Jewish community, a disproportionate selection of the resources for interfaith families focused on Christian/Jewish marriages and families.

In the early 2000s, however, advocates for blending Christian and Jewish elements in interfaith family life began to articulate a new version of interfaith family life. Using a consumption-inflected multiculturalism, they framed Christianity and Judaism as cultures from which a family could draw to create their own pastiche of

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[184]Robert D. Putnam and David E. Campbell, *American Grace: How Religion Divides and Unites Us* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2012), 151.
Putnam and Campbell define intermarriage as marriages between members of the following groups: Catholic, Jewish, mainline Protestant, Evangelical Protestant, and "other faiths." This means that a marriage between an Episcopalian and a Southern Baptist would count as intermarriage, but not one between a Reform Jew and an Orthodox Jew or an Episcopalian and a member of the United Church of Christ.
As noted in the introduction, the Pew Foundation puts this number closer to 37%, though the Pew Foundation is asking what percentage of marriages are currently interfaith and Putnam and Campbell are asking about the number of marriages that are interfaith at the moment that they are contracted.
[185] Ibid., 156.

traditions. The argument for a harmonious Christian/Jewish syncretic family life did not replace attempts to create the interfaith family with one dominant (usually Jewish) religious tradition, as described in the previous chapter. Rather, proponents of multicultural interfaith families, often members of such families themselves, added a new approach to interfaith family life, on suggesting that dual-religion homes did not stem from an inability to choose an identity, but from a distinct set of values, including the refusal to privilege one parent's identity over the other's. Rather than focusing on the power dynamics of multiculturalism, as in educational policy debates or ethnic studies conversations, this popular multiculturalism celebrated diversity as a rich array of cultural resources while downplaying the possibility of conflict or power imbalance resulting from difference. Instead, this form of multiculturalism calls individuals to strive to "break down barriers" and "build mutual understanding across our differences."[186] Interfaith families, proponents argued, were an excellent place for children to be fundamentally shaped as multicultural citizens to be able to reach across difference, because their very familial relationships would equip them with skills to act as cultural brokers.

Interfaith Families, Occasional Ethnicity, and the Creation of Dispositions

This rhetoric of multiculturalism arose in the 1960s and 1970s, a conversation that placed the category of "culture" in the center of American civic life. In 1965, the Johnson administration repealed restrictions on Asian immigration, creating a new group of immigrants, who, as Kyoti Joshi points out, could not be fully integrated into the biracial

[186] Henry Goldschmidt, *Race and Religion Among the Chosen People of Crown Heights* (Rutgers University Press, 2006), 117.

categories of American society. According to scholars such as Richard Hetch and Matthew Frye Jacobson, this change, combined with the rise of political movements like Black Pride and the American Indian Movement (AIM), created a new interest in understanding one's ethnic and racial history and context. Though at first the "Roots phenomenon" was the territory of people of color, it also reshaped the ways in which white Americans connected with their ethnic heritages, creating space for them to be owned in public settings.[187] This tendency became so strong that by 1990, most white Americans identified themselves with an ethnic group on the US census, rather than as simply "American," a notable change from just 20 years before.[188] These social shifts, among others, resulted in culture becoming an important category in American communal life, tied to an understanding of how the nation might navigate the differences within its boundaries.

As Henry Goldschmidt points out, however, multiculturalists understand culture differently than do anthropologists. If, for anthropologists, culture is "a fluid and contentious process that transgresses the boundaries of clearly defined communities," for multiculturalists, culture is much less fluid.[189] Rather, it is imagined as a stable force that can be distilled into "static objects," including holidays, foods, and specific items that can

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[187] Khyati Joshi, *New Roots in America's Sacred Ground* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2006); Matthew Frye Jacobson, *Roots Too: White Ethnic Revival in Post-Civil Rights America* (Harvard University Press, 2008); Marilyn Halter, *Shopping for Identity: The Marketing of Ethnicity* (New York, NY: Schocken Books, 2000); Hecht, Richard, "Active Versus Passive Pluralism: A Changing Style of Civil Religion," in *Religious Pluralism and Civil Society*, vol. 612, The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science (Los Angeles: Sage Publications, Inc., 2007), 133–151.
[188] Halter, *Shopping for Identity: The Marketing of Ethnicity*, 11.
[189] Goldschmidt, *Race and Religion Among the Chosen People of Crown Heights*, 131.

be made or purchased.[190] In a cultural framework, an object that might have theological significance in another system of meaning, a *kippah* or an icon of a saint, a menorah or a crèche, becomes instead "self-evident signs of membership in homogenous "cultural" groups." When the objects become cultural, they then become equivalent, within and across cultures. Eating gefilte fish becomes as much a marker of Jewishness as lighting Shabbat candles, though from a Jewish legal standpoint one is a food resulting from economic necessity and the other fulfills a commandment from God. Both practices similarly become equivalent to Christian practices of dying Easter eggs or singing Christmas carols referencing the Christ child. The process of remaking these practices as cultural does not mean that they necessarily mattered less, simply that they were conceptualized differently than when some were understood as having meaning that referred back to commandments from God or signifiers of faith and piety. Rather, in a multicultural understanding, one is Jewish because one eats matzo ball soup; one is Italian Catholic because one abstains from meat until after midnight on Christmas Eve.

If, in a multicultural system of identity formation, identity became tied to certain practices, those practices were inherently tied to consumption. European-Americans in particular tend to express ethnic identity through consumption of material and non-material commodities such as "Kiss Me, I'm Irish" aprons, klezmer music, and vacation packages to visit the homeland, the old country or—in the case of American Jews—Israel. This market exploded in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, and resulted in what Marilyn Halter describes as an occasional or optional ethnicity. Consumers could play up or play down their ethnic identities by increasing or decreasing

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[190] Ibid.

culturally marked consumption. Similarly, consumers could explore and combine different identities, through their consumption of ethnic material or experiences. One could also combine ethnicities, either participating in multiple forms of consumption or in forms that merged heritages themselves, such as using an Irish heritage visa card to purchase Manischewitz brand Passover Gold Pizza mix.[191] The identities remain "optional" precisely because, at least for white Americans, they can be combined, put on, or taken off largely at will. Halter notes "offspring of parents with different ethnic backgrounds are particularly receptive to the possibilities of this more occasional ethnicity, focusing on the wealth and multiplicity of cultural resources on which they can draw."[192] If institutions and other sources of authority defined religion by affiliation, truth claims, and strict understandings of peoplehood, the language of ethnicity allowed more flexibility for combining traditions than did the language of religious choice; it created space for the pastiche of practices to be viewed as yet another form of multiculturalism.

Multicultural identity then becomes the ability to occasionally participate in elements of ethnic culture, fusing different elements of culture together to create hybrids, like kosher for Passover pizza, or taking part in them serially: Irish step dancing class on Tuesday afternoons and Hebrew school on Sunday mornings. What she does not ask is how participating in these ethnically defined activities might shape the actor. Participating in these ethnic activities, however, deeply impacts how individuals create and form their identities.

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[191] Halter, *Shopping for Identity: The Marketing of Ethnicity*.
[192] Halter, *Shopping for Identity: The Marketing of Ethnicity*, 189.

Optional Religious Identities and the Authentic Self

If multicultural interfaith families have begun to use optional ethnicity to create a pastiche of practices, they have grounded that choice in the moral framework of American therapeutic culture, that is, the psychological development of the individual potentially over and above the needs of the group. Because therapeutic culture values the spiritual growth of the individual and rhetorically empowers that individual with the ability to select and evaluate religious practices, it has created the potential for interfaith families to apply a consumer model to their religious practices.

T. J. Jackson Lears notes that by the beginning of the 20th century, "Americans began to imagine a self that was neither simple nor genuine, but fragmented and socially constructed."[193] In the emerging therapeutic society, the ultimate goal of the self was to seek, despite its fragmentation, self-actualization through experience. Lears suggests that while the experience could be controlled or spontaneous, "commitments outside the self shrank to meet the seeker's immediate emotional requirements."[194] This development of the self puts the needs of the individual above the needs of the community or family, such that by "urging unending personal growth," proponents of this therapeutic ethos "[d]evalu[ed] the customs and traditions designed to preserve cultural memory," and ultimately devalued "the personal memory enshrined in family continuity."[195] The self-

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[193] T. J. Jackson Lears, "From Salvation to Self-Realization: Advertising and the Therapeutic Roots of the Consumer Culture, 1880-1930," in *The Culture of Consumption: Critical Essays in American History 1880-1980*, ed. Richard Wightman Fox and T. J. Jackson Lears (Pantheon, 1983), 8.
[194] Ibid., 11.
[195] Ibid., 16.

realized individual of modern psychotherapeutic culture is, then, unrestricted by, but also unmoored from, the demands of traditional community structures.

Lear's analysis ends in 1920, but the culture that he describes continued throughout the twentieth century. It informed mid-century Christian and Jewish mass-market texts, such as Norman Vincent Peale's 1952 *The Power of Positive Thinking* and Joshua Loth Liebman's 1946 *Peace of Mind*.[196] Though the dominant mode of post-war religion involved "dwelling" in one's religious community for the bulk of one's lifetime, baby boomers became seekers, moving from one religious tradition to another or borrowing from a variety of religions. If many boomers turned away from religious institutions, they "grappled hard in search of a holistic, all-encompassing vision of life."[197] In doing so, they saw religion as "whatever one chose as one's own." Religion thus became an intensely personal journey rather than a shared, communal activity. The boomer generation, then, had a multitude of choices, an increasingly broad range of institutional options, but also practices and philosophies outside of institutional contexts from a range of cultural contexts. Focusing on what best served the individual's needs; boomers drew their practices from a variety of traditions, combining multiple traditions in a "pastiche-style of spirituality."

Despite the rootless quality of boomer religious life, scholars such as Robert Wuthnow and Wade Clark Roof argue that whether or not these religious seekers connect their activities to existing religious establishments, they often valued deep spiritual engagement. They therefore passed to their children a belief that religious practice and

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[196] Joshua L. Liebman, *Peace of Mind: Insights on Human Nature That Can Change Your Life* (Citadel, 1998); Norman Vincent Peale, *The Power of Positive Thinking*, First Fireside. (Touchstone, 2003).
[197] Roof, Greer, and Johnson, *A Generation of Seekers*, 250.

tradition exist to enhance the individual's spiritual life. In their formulation, then, one was religious or spiritual because it enhanced one's own experience, not because of one's obligation to the Jewish people, one's connection to the Catholic Church, or because of one's mother's fears about one's salvation. In the 1990s, when, according to Wuthnow, boomer religion set the dominant cultural tone outside of religious institutions, space opened up for religious patterns to operate in the same paradigm of choice as ethnic models. Individuals selected religious practices and material culture pragmatically rather than as dictated by religious communities.[198]

The possibility of combining religious practices did not immediately increase the options for Christian/Jewish interfaith families, however, because seekers tended to either leave their religion of origin altogether or added practices such as yoga or meditation, derived from Hinduism and Buddhism, to their Christian or Jewish practices and identity. Seeker models of religion did not, in most cases, allow for the combination of dominant forms of Christianity with dominant forms of Judaism. The addition of multiculturalism to that context allowed Christian and Jewish practices to be recast as ethnic practices rather than as historically competing and sometimes antagonistic religious traditions. This combination of multiculturalism and institutionally unbounded spiritual seeking present in the 1990s and early 2000s offered interfaith families new freedom to create hybrid identities for themselves. These blended identities sat easily in an emerging popular culture that accepted and often celebrated blended identities.

Multiculturalism, Spiritual Seeking, and an Expanded Field of Dispositions

[198] Bellah et al., *Habits of the Heart*, 219–249.

The turn towards spiritual seeking and the rise of multiculturalism created an environment in which combining Jewish and Christian practices ceased to be problematic. As the salience of theological difference declined, engaging in both religions' practices became not only possible but also desirable. As Bourdieu argues, however, practices are not only ornamentation—they form an individual's habitus. In combining practices, then, interfaith families provide their children with an expanded set of dispositions. While practices have always been combined in interfaith family life, in this millennial historical moment, a multicultural ethos informs the conscious blending of practices.

Christianity and Judaism, as framed by multicultural interfaith families, can best be understood as a focus on practice and identity over affiliation and belief. Despite the mosaic of practices made possible by this generation of religious seekers, advocates of such families downplay the language of religion in favor of language emphasizing "tradition" and "culture" against a definition of "religion," which implies affiliation with organized communities or around dedication to a specific theology. To be Jewish, then, one would meet the definitions of "who is a Jew" according to a defined Jewish movement. To be Christian, one would belong to a church and believe in Jesus. In doing so, these interfaith families who advocate for blending their heritages draw a distinction that Goldschmidt argues is essential to a multicultural project. When practices are tied to truth claims, viewed as either reflections of piety or holy commandments, they cease to be equivalent and cannot be blended.[199] As a result, advocates of multicultural interfaith

[199] In Goldschimdt's own work, he points out that if one sees Jewish food as a set of cultural markers, such that one is Jewish because one eats kugel, just as one is Jamacian because one eats jerk chicken, simply exchanging food and recipes is a mode of creating

families tend to use "tradition" and "culture" to describe practices maintained outside of the context of affiliation with a single tradition. The practices and identities that such sources emphasize are often home based: food, holiday celebrations, and family stories. They demonstrate a blending of traditions precisely in eliding difference. While a smaller subset of sources depicts the faith claims, prayer practices, and texts of the traditions, these sources also feature the children as participant observers who can witness religious practice but do so without fully absorbing the practices into their field of dispositions.

Just as the multicultural understanding of culture does not match the definition held by anthropologists, the "religion" against which interfaith families define themselves does not match definitions of the term used in religious studies. While the bulk of this chapter will explore the distinctions made within the rhetoric of multiculturalism, we must acknowledge that from a religious studies standpoint, the range of practices employed by multicultural interfaith families carry many of the characteristics of the religious. As Gary Laderman suggests, "cultures and communities [can be] tied together emotionally and cognitively, but also spiritually and materially by vital rituals, living myths, indescribable experiences, moral values, shared memories, and other commonly

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cultural diversity and getting along. If, instead, one sees food not as Jewish, but as kosher, which is to say adhering to a strict set of laws that must be followed because they were given by no less an authority than God, the entire playing field shifts. The foodways may or may not become more important, but they certainly cease to be simply ethnic markers. In his work, this different viewpoint on the function of food, cultural versus religious, is the point of miscommunication between the Black community and the Lubavitch community. It is important to note that while my interfaith families understand, and in fact use, the distinction that Goldschmidt depicts as existing within Crown Heights, both Jewish and Christian members of multicultural interfaith families adhere closely to the cultural model.

recognized features of religious life."[200] For interfaith families who actively keep both religions in play, religion as Laderman describes it had long existed within individual families, but around the turn of the millennium, more evidence arose of a "culture and community" of interfaith families in American society more broadly. These formal and informal networks came to embrace complex identities, cultivate an ability to move between religious cultures, and explore dual or hybrid practices.

In addition to a more fluid definition of Jewishness or Christian-ness, these sources reflect a relational understanding of practice that roots meaning in family heritage. Robert Orsi articulates an understanding of religion as rooted in relationships. Orsi speaks primarily of relationships between heaven and earth, writing, "[r]eligion is commonly thought of by modern people…as a medium, for explaining, understanding, and modeling reality." Instead, he poses "religion as a network of relationships between heaven and earth involving humans of all ages and many sacred figures together. These relationships have all the complexities—all the hopes, evasions, love, fear, denial, projections, misunderstandings, and so on—of relationships between humans."[201] The Christian and Jewish practices that these popular sources reflect demonstrate that they provide powerful ways of expressing these relationships, often as they exist between the living and either the dead of their own family or of their heritage. For interfaith families, drawing from a range of practices such as the cooking of family recipes or the displaying of heirlooms, whether or not the sources identify them as religious or actively push against such a definition, offers ways to maintain sacred relationships with relatives and

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[200] Gary Laderman, *Sacred Matters: Celebrity Worship, Sexual Ecstasies, The Living Dead and Other Signs of Religious Life in the United States* (New Press, 2009), xlv.
[201] Robert A. Orsi, *Between Heaven and Earth: The Religious Worlds People Make and the Scholars Who Study Them* (Princeton University Press, 2006), 3.

communities from both sides of the family and to shape a moral universe, whether or not a single formal affiliation was chosen for the household or any individual within it.

In this chapter, I argue that multiculturalism, optional ethnicity, and boomer-style religious sensibilities converged on a new approach to articulating interfaith religious identity. To that end, I find that, in conversations surrounding interfaith families (one-faith family versus blended family), the terms *religion* and *culture* have garnered specific definitions. "Religion" has become the territory of established communities. "Culture," has become a place where syncretism can occur. Sources as diverse as children's literature and adult novelty books connect religiously blended households to the traits of cultural flexibility and respect for difference. These traits function as moral virtues in the value system of multicultural America. In addition to depicting a set of values, those sources, the children's books in particular, depict a set of practices gaining in meaning because of their association with parents and grandparents or with the family's heritage. In this way, the very practices that the sources seek to describe as cultural take on a religious meaning.

Children's Literature: Multicultural Homes

A central component of multicultural interfaith family life at the turn of the millennium was helping children to feel that their dual religious family was inherently normal, a task that was in part a reaction to the call for single-religion homes discussed in

the previous chapter.[202] Effin Older's (2000) *My Two Grandmothers*, for instance, emphasizes festivities and foodways over the theological differences.[203] Older sidesteps the religious differences of Christianity and Judaism by presenting those identities as familial "traditions," combinable as long as the families show mutual respect for each other, rather than merely tolerating conflicting religious beliefs and practices. For Older, "traditional" becomes a term that flags a practice, an identity constituting action that can exist outside of the networks of meaning ascribed by contemporary American Christianities and Judaisms. She, and other authors like her depict, families in which mutual respect allows diverse practices to co-exist in a household and therefore point to a positively inflected multicultural life for interfaith families.

Older emphasizes the different familial relationships by tying religious identities to particular relatives. *My Two Grandmothers* was, unlike many other books aimed at children of interfaith marriage, published by Harcourt, a major, for-profit publisher. It depicts food as a primary element of familial identity, passed matrilineally through the generations. The story frames food as a "tradition" and values the food practices of the Christian farm family and the Jewish urban family equally, considering them both to be culturally specific. This balance acknowledges the cultural specificity of the dominant culture as well as the minority culture.

My Two Grandmothers is the story of a little girl named Lily who likes to visit her grandmothers: Grammy Lane, who lives on a farm in the country and Bubbe Silver, who lives in a tall apartment building in the city. Lily visits her grandmothers several times a

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[202] Other books, like *Papa Jethro*, by Deborah Bodin Cohen, published in 2007, and *Mommy Never Went to Hebrew School*, published in 1989, were written for children in Jewish interfaith families.

[203] Effin Older, *My Two Grandmothers* (Harcourt Children's Books, 2000).

year, describing the fun things she does with each of them. Each grandmother shares aspects of who she is with Lily throughout the year, and many of those aspects have to do with food. After a cold winter day of snowshoeing in the woods, Grammy Lane suggests red flannel hash to warm them up. "Flannel? Like my pajamas?" Lily responds. "Heavens, no!" Grammy Lane says, "Flannel because it warms you up. My mother, your great-grandmother, taught me how to make it. I'll teach you someday, too. It's a Lane tradition." When Lily next sees Bubbe Silver, she tells her about red flannel hash, and Bubbe responds, "Sounds like my gefilte fish…. My mother, your great-grandmother, taught me how to make it. It is a Silver tradition." Like Grammy Lane, Bubbe Silver promises to pass on the tradition. Even the food choices that Older chose underscore that Grammy and Bubbe are not so different—hash and gefilte fish are both recipes for using up leftover bits of meat by people who did not have the luxury of wasting anything. The word "tradition" defines the recipes, connecting Lily to her ancestors. The narrative does not address, at this moment, the idea that one grandmother is Christian, the other Jewish. Lily is simply presented as learning two sets of family recipes that ensconce her increasingly deeply in her dual identity as a Lane and as a Silver.

As Lily works her way through her year of visits with grandmothers, she spends Hanukkah with Bubbe Silver and Christmas with Grammy Lane. Lily details the Hanukkah preparations, including setting out the menorah and making latkes, "stacks of latkes." "We Silvers *love* latkes," Lily reflects before she describes the holiday celebration. "Pretty soon Bubbe's apartment is filled with aunts and uncles and cousins. Everyone holds hands around the menorah. Bubbe lights the Hanukkah candles, and we sing a prayer in Hebrew. After the prayer, the kids get presents. Then we all eat latkes.

Sometimes I eat so many, my stomach feels like it is going to burst." Christmas at Grammy Lane's comes immediately after Hanukkah. Christmas morning comes with presents, and the cousins play games and eat chocolate fudge until dinner. "Christmas dinner looks just like a picture in a book: turkey with stuffing, mashed potatoes, cranberry sauce, and Grammy's warm homemade rolls. And for dessert? Pie. Apple, raspberry, pumpkin, and mince. We Lanes *love* pie!" After dinner, the Lane family gathers around the piano to sing Christmas carols. Lily's favorite Christmas carol is "Away in a Manger," In these examples, the religious differences are emphasized through the holiday traditions. While conventional markers of religion are noted, the menorah and Hebrew prayer and the Christian carol "Away in the Manger" take a back seat to the food in Lily's narrative. Christmas and Hanukkah are about latkes, a turkey dinner, and many kinds of pie. The prayer and the carol are part of the "traditions" but do not create the definitive statements of identity and belonging, "We Silvers love latkes" and "We Lanes love pie." For Lily, it is the participation in the holiday food culture that allows her to be comfortably part of both families.

The story concludes when Lily realizes that "Grammy Lane never gets to light Hanukkah candles or sip a Donald Duck.[204] I think about how Bubbe Silver never gets to sing Christmas carols or look for animal tracks in the snow." She decides to invite both of her grandmothers for a party at her house. "Please bring something traditional," she writes and indeed, Grammy Lane brings apple pie and red flannel hash and Bubbe Silver brings gefilte fish and horseradish. The grandmothers, who clearly get along, smile at

[204] A Donald Duck is beverage that Lily enjoys at Bubbe Silver's country club. It is a drink with three layers of liquid, one red, one blue, one green. Lily considers it a magic drink because the colors do not run together.

each other. "She's just like a Silver," Bubbe says to Grammy, who responds, "Every inch a Lane." In the world of the children's book, Lily can be both a Lane and a Silver, and since, as readers, we never learn Lily's last name, we do not know whether she is actually a Lane or a Silver. Similarly, we never see her in her own home, engaging with the practices forged or neglected by her parents. While it is clear that Grammy Lane is Christmas and the all-American farm and that Bubbe Silver is Hanukkah and the big city, Lily herself remains without context.

My Two Grandmothers frames Lily's identity as inherently blended, both Lane *and* Silver. Food comes across as the aspect of an interfaith family that can be shared and transmitted to Lily, at the same time that it provides a family practice, referred to over and over again in the text when one grandmother or the other explains that a recipe is "traditional." Both grandmothers offer Lily treasured family recipes, telling Lily about the great-grandmothers who taught them and indicating that she too can be a link in both matrilineal family rituals. She can be "every inch" a Lane and a Silver, a point that Lily herself underscores when she comments that "we Silvers love latkes" and that "we Lanes love pie." [205] Lily can go to their houses and sing prayers in Hebrew or Christmas carols that explicitly engage with the theme of the Christ child. In this text, the word "traditional" is central to Lily's blended identity, because it allows the text to avoid theological incompatibilities, while claiming the central importance of the cultural practices, giving them the weight of family history—Lily can participate in both family traditions. When she tries, however, to forge her own family tradition, the theologically

[205] Ironically, while the food traditions are clearly passed from woman to woman, they are associated with the last names, "Lane" and "Silver." At no point does the book acknowledge this tension.

oriented prayers and songs fall away. As much as Lily regrets that Bubbe Silver does not get to sing Christmas carols and Grammy Lane does not light the menorah, when the grandmothers bring something traditional, they bring the easily sharable, cultural aspects of their heritage: red flannel hash and gefilte fish. A new tradition can be born, and the sharing of traditional foods offers a safe venue for that tradition.

The book ends with the new, "safe" tradition of Grandmother's Day. Though conventional Christianity and Judaism are no longer central to Lily's identity, the traditions that she shares with Bubbe Silver and Grammy Lane are, nonetheless, religious according to Orsi's relational understanding of religion. The work of historian Elizabeth Pleck offers further insight into the specifically familial ways that food ritual creates a sense of identity. She argues that food rituals give Americans a sense of who they are and where they came from that serve "to define one's identity but also indicate changes in identity."[206] Pleck suggests that women, in particular, use food to memorialize family members. During holidays, when women cook together, they commemorate a dead mother or grandmother through preparing her recipes and telling stories about her as they teach younger generations how to prepare the dish.[207] In teaching Lily the recipes that their own mothers taught them, Grammy Lane and Bubbe Silver are replicating this creation of family meaning—tightly tying Lily to both her Christian and Jewish family heritages. In doing so, they connect Lily to a relational network of female kin, living and

[206] Elizabeth H. Pleck, *Celebrating the Family: Ethnicity, Consumer Culture, and Family Rituals* (Harvard University Press, 2000), 238.
[207] Ibid., 24–27.

dead, grandmothers and great-grandmothers, reminiscent of Orsi's relational definitions of religion.[208]

Bubbe and Gram: My Two Grandmothers, published in 1996, is one of a minority of texts that delve into the differences and potential incompatibilities between the traditions.[209] Independently published, the book won awards in 1997 and 1998, the Publisher's Marketing Association's Benjamin Franklin Silver Medal Award for excellence in independent publishing and the Church and Synagogue Library Association's Helen Keating Ott Award for Outstanding Contribution to Children's Literature, respectively. It was written by Joan C. Hawxhurst, the first executive director of the Dovetail Institute, a nonaffiliated institution designed to support interfaith families in living out both religious traditions in one home.

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[208] For example, Harriet Goldner's self-published *Two Grandmothers to Love* (2006) described Grammy and Grandma and made sure readers understood the differences between them: one has straight hair, the other curly; one has a cat, the other a dog; one is Jewish, the other Christian. The text's refrain, after each difference, was that both grandmothers loved their shared grandchildren very much. Their respect for each other underscored a multicultural theme, indicating that both traditions were worthy of respect and that extended families could graciously accept difference among the members. Having established mutual respect and shared love across differences as an important value, Goldner explains that Ellie and Isaac, the grandchildren, spend important holidays with the grandmothers. "Holidays and special days are always more fun when we are with people we love," Goldner writes. Comparing Christmas, Easter, Hanukkah, and Passover to birthdays, she points out that a birthday party would be no fun at all if no one came. "It may not be anyone else's birthday, but everyone there has a good time sharing your celebration. All kinds of celebrations are meant to be shared with family and friends. That is why it is fun for everyone to be together on Grammy and Grandma's special holidays." The book suggests that it was appropriate, even good, for the children to share these holidays with their grandmothers, but left the holidays firmly in the grandmothers' territory without indicating how the traditions were celebrated or maintained in the lives and homes of the grandchildren. The act of comparing holidays like Christmas and Hanukkah to birthdays may not have decreased the overall significance of the holidays, but it certainly ensconced them as the territory of the grandmothers, rather than the grandchildren.

[209] Joan C. Hawxhurst, *Bubbe and Gram: My Two Grandmothers* (Kalamazzo, MI: Dovetail Publishing, 1996).

The Dovetail Institute did not shy away from differences in the beliefs and truth claims of Christianity and Judaism, and *Bubbe and Gram* addresses some of the differing theological tenets of Christianity and Judaism. Unlike other books, it depicts the mezuzah on Bubbe's door and the Lord's Prayer with a picture of Jesus on Gram's wall, implicitly hinting at tensions between the traditions, with the prayer in the mezuzah proclaiming the oneness of God and the picture of Jesus gesturing towards the Trinity. Hawxhurst mentions prayers as part of both Bubbe's Shabbat dinner and Gram's Sunday dinner. Descriptions of Passover, Easter, Christmas, and Hanukkah focus as much on their particular claims about Moses, Christ's resurrection, the Maccabees, and the manger as on the festivities of the holidays. While the religious content of *Bubbe and Gram* is out of step with the other texts, it is produced by an organization that is explicitly open to actively raising children in multiple traditions, and the organization affirms that interfaith parents should address competing truth claims. Most importantly, though, the book's fundamental message is the same as that of the books that focus less explicitly on theology: the grandmothers deeply respect each other and fully support the other's attempts to pass on aspects of her tradition. The narrator notes, "There are lots of things that are different about Bubbe and Gram. Sometimes Bubbe doesn't understand the things I tell her about Gram's house. She says that's because she grew up practicing a different religion. But she always tells me that it's good to learn about being a Christian." On the next page, the conversation is repeated with the Christian grandmother.

Even in this more religiously oriented manual, the grandmothers are happy to have the grandchild learn about both traditions, including the importance of religious figures. Like the more secularly oriented books, the grandparent-focused books leave the

religious traditions in the grandparents' homes. The grandchild remains a participant observer, taking part in the traditions without a sense that the traditions are being instilled in the child.

Though one way in which advocates of multicultural interfaith families deal with religious (or even cultural) difference is to displace difference on the grandparent generation, an emphasis on cultural equivalence allows them to bring these practices into the homes of the children. *Light the Lights* by Margaret Moorman was published by a Scholastic imprint, and was therefore intended for a potentially large distribution.[210] Beautifully illustrated, it celebrates the holiday season, focusing on the lights of the menorah and the Christmas tree. With her parents and her family, the main character prepares for the many days of Hanukkah, celebrating with visiting relatives. When Hanukkah ends, they put away the menorah and decorate for Christmas. Both parents are involved in both celebrations, the holidays flowing into each other to create a holiday season emphasizing the parallel practices of holiday lights, family, and food; no mention is made of church, synagogue, or any family disagreement about merging traditions.[211]

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[210] Margaret Moorman, *Light The Lights! A Story About Celebrating Hanukkah And Christmas*, Reprint. (Cartwheel, 1999).

[211] Michelle Meyer's self-published *My Daddy Is Jewish and My Mommy Is Christian* similarly depicted the coexistence of Christianity and Judaism in the child's home though it addressed religious community and reached beyond the winter holidays by mentioning Passover and Easter. The main character further explains, "I go to Temple with my daddy on holidays like Rosh Hashanah, Hanukkah, Yom Kippur, and Passover. Mommy comes too!" On Ash Wednesday, Easter, and Christmas, the family attends church together. The traditions of meals with dessert, dreidel, holiday songs, and gifts are mentioned before the book ends, like the others, with a mention of respect. "I like that my daddy is Jewish and my mommy is Christian. We all love each other and we respect one another too…. Mommy tells me that we should all love one another and learn about different religions all the time. Daddy tells me that we can have different religions and still respect each other. That makes the world go round!"

Because of the Reform movement's critique of maintaining a two-religion home addressed in chapter four, proponents of multicultural interfaith families address the fears about interfaith family identity with a simple message for children: it is normal for children to have two religions in one home. It is not troubling to their sense of self, at least not when the parents and grandparents respect each other. In fact, where holidays are concerned, the blended traditions can be fun. With the exception of Older's *My Two Grandmothers*, in which the dramatic tension comes from Lily's disappointment that her grandmothers did not get to share each other's traditions, these books lack the story arc of a central problem largely because their message is that there is no problem. They are able to make these claims largely because they avoid questions of theologically structured belief and affiliation, places where the religious identities come into conflict.

While these books tend to downplay theological and institutional particularity, they emphasize the close familial bonds and relationships that the child has with its parents and grandparents. Children share in the religious celebrations of their family members and draw meaning from the relationships that the children have with the adults in their families. The traditions depicted in loving detail in books like *My Two Grandmothers* and *Light the Lights* are often those of ethnic affiliation—Jewish latkes and English (Protestant) mince pies.[212] The family traditions depicted in these stories are in fact shared practices that connect the main characters of the children's books to their

[212] For work addressing the understanding of food as not only national but religious, see Daniel Sack, *Whitebread Protestants: Food and Religion in American Culture*, illustrated edition (Palgrave Macmillan, 2001); Goldschmidt, *Race and Religion Among the Chosen People of Crown Heights*; Carol Harris-Shapiro, "Bloody Shankbones and Braided Bread: The Food Voice and the Fashioning of American Jewish Identities.," *Food & Foodways: History & Culture of Human Nourishment* 14, no. 2 (April 2006): 67–90, doi:10.1080/07409710600691907; Hasia R. Diner, *Hungering for America: Italian, Irish, and Jewish Foodways in the Age of Migration* (Harvard University Press, 2003).

parents and grandparents. Additionally, they are part of the familial history, as they are often described as having been part of the childhoods of the older generations. These familial practices connect the main characters into the relational networks coming from both their Christian and Jewish contexts, locating the children in both matrices of meaning.

Multiculturalism and Adolescent Moral Formation

While proponents of multicultural interfaith families gave small children messages that it was all right to celebrate dual holidays and share traditions with family members, for older children, they acknowledged the reality that, at least according to some people, one cannot be half-Jewish, delving into existential topics about the meaning of "halfness" much more than does the picture-book genre. In 2000, Virginia Euwer Wolff published *The Mozart Season*, a young adult novel about Allegra, an adolescent violinist with a Jewish father and a "not Jewish at all" mother from Kansas.[213] At the end of the book, Allegra re-affirms an understanding of her identity that has threaded through the text: "You can be half Jewish. Maybe whole Jews or whole Gentiles wouldn't understand. But you can be. I am."[214] Allegra's closing words stand in sharp contrast to Margaret's closing thoughts on her dual religious heritage in *Are You There, God? It's Me, Margaret*, published in 1970.

Thirty years before Wolff created Allegra, Blume's Margaret connects Christianity and Judaism to churches and synagogues. She goes to houses of worship

[213] Virginia Euwer Wolff, *The Mozart Season* (Square Fish, 2007).
[214] Ibid., 247.

because she wants to belong to a religious tradition. Despite the absence of institutional belonging, Margaret has a personal relationship with God. She feels His presence and confides in Him frequently. When she fails to find Him in any religious institution, she feels betrayed and angry, believing that if she had been raised within a tradition, she would have been able to find God within religious structures. Margaret's social setting makes her lack of religious identity a problem: while Margaret told her readers that not being any religion was fine in New York, in her New Jersey suburb, every child has a religious home, be it Protestant, Catholic, or Jewish.

Allegra, by contrast, lives in a community in which church or synagogue is rarely (if ever) mentioned. Her blended heritage does not trouble the people in her daily life. Though presumably Jewish himself, her violin teacher and confidante, Mr. Kaplan, is unconcerned with Allegra's halfness. Her older brother, Bro David, tells her that she cannot be made all Jewish, supporting her in understanding herself as half and half. Only her grandmother, Bubbe Raisa, in far-away New York, is concerned about Allegra's Jewishness. Though Allegra feels empathy for Bubbe Raisa, her concerns do not shake Allegra’s sense of herself.

The difference between Allegra and Margaret's experiences of their blended backgrounds demonstrates the impact of multiculturalism over time. Margaret is troubled by her blended heritage, believing that because she is both, she is nothing and is surrounded by people who are depicted as fitting neatly into religious categories: Jew, Presbyterian, Methodist, Catholic. Allegra acknowledges that not everyone believes that she can be half Jewish but maintains that despite those opinions, she is both halves and proud to be so:

> One, if you are half and half, you're lucky because each kind has some really good things about it. Gentiles are good at building things, cathedrals and huge barns and things. Jews have courage to wander all around the world getting abused and killed and still go on having the Torah. It must be a terrible courage. Two, if you're half and half, you're the thing that can't be. You can't be half Jewish. So you go through your life being something that can't be.

Though Allegra suggests that it is a disadvantage to be "something that can't be," she compares herself to her friend Jessica, who is half African-American and half Chinese, to point out that blending is possible. Just as Jessica both identifies with her black family's roll in American history and attends Chinese school, both halves of Allegra's heritage are fully present in her life as well. Her mother, she reflected, could cook both Kansas food—corn cakes and eggplant pudding, and Jewish food—latkes and pecan *haroset*.[215] On her bed is a patchwork quilt, under which the quilt maker, her great–grandmother, had died. On the wall in her dining room is a picture of her great-grandmother, Elter Bubbe Leah, for whom she was named. Over the course of the book, she inherits Elter Bubbe's embroidered purse, which is in the picture. Allegra knows the stories of both great-grandmothers, the Kansas farm wife who dreamed of being a dancer, the Polish Jew who died at Treblinka. Both of those heritages wend through Allegra's sense of herself and of the world that she inhabits. As she moves through the main dramatic arc of the story, their lives and deaths lend gravitas to the moral questions that she faces.

The absence of Christian or Jewish community and religious teaching also does not create disruption in Allegra's life. Despite their different backgrounds, her parents are both Julliard-trained professional musicians. Everything that religion offers—discipline,

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[215] Ibid., 29.

empathy, experience of transcendence, a space to contemplate deep questions, and community—Allegra gets through music. Her violin teacher, Mr. Kaplan, used Mozart to teach Allegra about empathy and tenacity, which become dominant themes as they are echoed by her parents and their friends. These messages provide the moral structure of Allegra's adolescence and are depicted as shared concerns of her community, much as religious teachings bind a church or synagogue community.

The difference between Margaret's experience in the late 1960s and Allegra's in the 1990s suggests a shift not so much in attitudes toward interfaith families but in the social worlds that those families entered. Rather than a triumphant depiction of intermarriage as the gateway to Americanness, as in the earlier *Bridget Loves Bernie* (discussed in full in chapter two), *The Mozart Season* simply painted a girl growing up in a fairly cosmopolitan, secular segment of America. Though secular, her society used the arts to access both moral meaning and community. Religious and ethnic identity, by contrast, defined neither social or family life, nor identity. Judy Blume based Margaret's religiously segregated social world on her own memories of New Jersey in the 1950s, the decade with the highest religious affiliation of the twentieth century. For Blume's Margaret, her family's lack of institutional membership puts her outside of the cultural mainstream and differentiates her from her peer group.

By contrast, religion is not a dominant feature of the 1990s Portland, Oregon, in which Wolff locates *The Mozart Season.* Neither Allegra's friends nor her parents nor their friends discuss religious community; the discussions of morality and empathy that recur throughout the book do not take place in markedly Christian or Jewish language. Instead, they form their communities and morality in other contexts, namely in the arts

and in the compassionate consideration of the lives of others. In the novel, Allegra and her family wrestle not only with the stories of her great-grandmothers, but also with the histories and humanities of a homeless family friend and other young musicians in her concerto competition. The text leaves no doubt that the members of Allegra's community struggle with large questions and experience transcendence through the arts. They do so without the presence of traditionally defined Christianity and Judaism.

The differences between the worlds of *The Mozart Season* and *Are You There, God? It's Me, Margaret* reflect the broader social patterns that Robert Wuthnow describes in *The Restructuring of American Religion.* As Wuthnow shows, the second half of the twentieth century saw fewer Americans affiliating with organized religion. The difference in Margaret and Allegra's experiences suggests one outcome of these changing cultural patterns for religiously blended families. A large part of Margaret's discomfort with her lack of religious identity, as was discussed in chapter two, came from community expectations of religious belonging. In Margaret's suburban world of the late 1960s, belonging required a concrete religious identity. In Allegra's fictional Portland, Oregon in the 1990s, a religious identity was simply not necessary. These shifts created more room for interfaith families to build lives and communities outside of the confines of organized religion.

Half-ness and the Making of Cultural Brokers

While proponents of multicultural interfaith families address children in earnest tones of support, their outreach to adults assumes a very different tone. Interfaith couple

Daniel Klein and Freke Vuijst and Ron Gompertz, also one-half of an interfaith marriage, both produced novelty books that, while filled with humor and trivia, also advocate for interfaith and intentionally blended family cultures. They argue, first, for half-Jews as providing a normative Jewish experience in the late twentieth century, a stance with which they challenge the position of any number of Jewish institutions, as outlined in chapter four. They also celebrate a set of characteristics nurtured in an intentionally interfaith home, including tolerance and an ability to act as cultural brokers. These traits, presented as valuable moral goods, echo the values of a multicultural, millennial society.

Daniel Klein and Freke Vuijst not only affirm the possibility of half-Jewishness but also recommend it in 2000's *The Half Jewish Book: A Celebration*.[216] The western Massachusetts couple dedicates the book to their daughter Samara and thanked two of her friends, "young half-Jews all, who gracefully and proudly embrace both halves of their heritages."[217] They opened by announcing that "we are living in the era of the half-Jew" as the majority of American Jews marry non-Jews and "the number of American half-Jews under the age of eleven now exceeds the number of American full Jews under eleven. And this half-Jewish population will only grow older and larger as the general

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[216] Daniel Klein and Freke Vuijst, *The Half-Jewish Book: A Celebration* (Villard, 2000), x.

[217] The term "half-Jew" has a fraught history, dating back to World War II and earlier, see:
Cynthia A. Crane, *Divided Lives: The Untold Stories of Jewish-Christian Women in Nazi Germany* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2003); Michael Burleigh and Wolfgang Wippermann, *The Racial State: Germany 1933-1945* (Cambridge University Press, 1993).
The term's use in debates about interfaith family life is complicated. Some people claim the term in defiance of those who frame Judaism in exclusively religious terms or halahkic terms and argue that one can be Jewish or not, but a partial Jewish identity is not possible. Sometimes, proponents of the term, on websites such as half-Jewish.net, use the term without reference to its connection to anti-Semitism. Others actually draw directly from persecution of those with one Jewish parent or grandparent to defend their claim of partial Jewishness.

population ages and the percentage of intermarriage increases."[218] In short, Klein and Vuijst see half-Jewishness as a normative American experience, having taken over the fully Jewish experience in a process they find unlikely to be reversed. They therefore imply that the concerns of the half-Jewish family or individual should be viewed as at least as important as the needs of the Jewish community. Their claim attempts to undercut some of the sharpest Jewish critiques of intermarriage; if intermarriage is a growing trend and more children are born half Jewish than Jewish, then the needs of the blended families and not of the Jewish community should take precedence. They call, then, for an acknowledgement that the half-Jewish experience has come to dominate the American Jewish landscape and for the celebration of that reality.

Klein and Vuijst acknowledge that being half Jewish can be hard. Specifically, they locate the challenges in social responses: they point out that a child with a Jewish father and therefore a Jewish last name may face anti-Semitism from the broader American culture. At the same time, her lack of a Jewish mother would prevent many Jews and Jewish communities from accepting her as Jewish. Still, *The Half-Jewish Book* came down "solidly and enthusiastically on the side of celebrati[ng]" Half-Jewish identity. [219] The couple interviewed and surveyed over 100 “half Jews” and collected data on half-Jewish celebrities, historical figures, and artists, as well as resources for half Jews. On the basis of this research, they claim that rather than being a "fractional" identity, being half Jewish could be a "double" identity. In other words, they oppose the

[218] Ibid., xv.
[219] Ibid.

denigration of half-Jewish identity by suggesting it as a "cultural, intellectual, and aesthetic mix that is…greater than the sum of its parts."[220]

Klein and Vuijst take a broad definition of what makes one half-Jewish:

> It does not matter which parent is Jewish and which parent is not. And it does not matter if the Jewish parent is observant or not. It does not matter if the non-Jewish parent converted to Judaism upon marriage. It doesn't matter which—if any—religion the person was brought up in or what religion he has chosen to follow. In other words, a person is half-Jewish if half of her genetic or cultural make up is Jewish and half is not. That is it.[221]

As a result, they suggest that because the home could, and inevitably would, contain elements of both cultures, raising a child to acknowledge that bicultural reality was the most honest approach. Because they draw a distinction between culture and religion, they maintain that such an approach can be taken even if a single religion is chosen for the household. Again, their rhetoric of blending is maintained in part by separating Christian and Jewish beliefs or formal affiliation from what they refer to as their "cultural, intellectual, and aesthetic" elements.

Klein and Vuijst frame the formation that occurs in interfaith families as a moral good largely because they argue that children of interfaith marriages are more successful than average in multicultural, millennial America. They therefore spend much of their book using famous half-Jews to tease out the traits created by the double perspective that they believe blended homes foster. In the case of author J. D. Salinger, the child of a Jewish father and a Scotch-Irish mother, they argue that despite critical complaints that he downplayed his own Jewish roots in his fiction, "a good argument can be made that

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[220] Ibid., xvii.
[221] Ibid., xix.

Salinger embraced his true roots—his half-Jewish/half-Gentile roots." They maintain that the Glass siblings, understood to be the most autobiographical of his characters, "are prescient prototypes of contemporary urban and sophisticated half-Jews: secular by upbringing, but spiritual by inclination; talented; talkative; introspective; self-conscious; and dazzlingly 'mixed-up.'"[222] Essentially, they argue that the creativity that animates the Glass siblings comes from their dual heritages. Similarly, they suggest that though Gloria Steinem "insists that her talent for fitting in with any group is simply the outgrowth of being a woman…. Steinem's excelling at this talent may also be accounted for by her insider/outsider status as a half-Jew—starting with her experiences at Smith, where she moved smoothly between Jewish and Gentile society."[223] Klein and Vuijst then tied Steinem's (and Harvard president Rudenstine's) success to flexibility bred of hybridity. When discussing Lenny Kravitz, they argue that sampling or pulling from two cultural influences, as Kravtiz does in his music, "became the defining cultural activity of his generation," thereby underscoring the value of such skills by suggesting that they are particularly necessary in an increasingly diverse American society. [224]

While Klein and Vuijst work hard to sell the positive traits that they associate with the half-Jewish identity, the celebratory aspect of their work depends on their assertion that the newly fused whole is actually better than the sum of its parts. This assertion rests on a new set of assumptions. First, the authors consider individuals more important than religious communities. No mention is made of the impact of intermarriage on the Jewish people in *Half-Jewish.* Rather, the authors critique organized Judaism (writ

[222] Ibid. 135.
[223] Ibid., 97.
[224] Ibid., 230.

large) for its failure to support patrilineal Jews, whose last names exposed them to anti-Semitism but whose patrilineal status excluded them from communal belonging. Second, Klein and Vuijst do not understand growing up outside of institutional religion life to be inherently lesser than a religiously shaped childhood. They express no concern about salvation, nor do they assume a lack of moral formation or tradition in those with a dual heritage and a secular life. Rather, they believe that interacting with two cultures fosters versatility and cross-cultural understanding. The valuing of these traits, like the repeated use of the word multicultural, demonstrates a shift in attitude directly tied to the late 1990s enthusiasm for a deeply syncretic popular multiculturalism. The message contrasts sharply with the assumption that raising children without a single religious tradition will confuse them; indeed, Christianity and Judaism are not even framed as religious identities. Framing these traditions as cultural, Klein and Vuijst insist that combining them creates new, valuable multicultural identities.

The authors do not explain why they consider it more honest to acknowledge that both cultures exist in any blended family, regardless of religious affiliation. Their explanation, however, is in line with the arguments of social theorists like Pierre Bourdieu, who explained that parents inevitably and unintentionally sculpt their children's *habitus*—their conscious and unconscious cultural predilections. Parents are formed in their own cultural contexts and cannot help but pass on their dispositions to their offspring. Since both parents are, then, transmitting their own, different cultural dispositions, the children end up with a field of cultural patterns that is larger than the one either parent brought to the table.

While Klein and Vuijst do differentiate Jewish and Christian cultural identities, it is important to note that they see a distinct moral advantage to the traits that they associate with a dual, expanded set of cultural dispositions. They also point to the ability of half-Jewish children to find comfort in the religious practices of both traditions, despite the competing truth claims. While their argument, then, turns on this distinction between culture and religion, their model both allows space for blended religiosity and, I argue, suggests a Christian/Jewish religious identity that they simultaneously frame as the outgrowth of existing as marginal in both religious cultures and suggest is becoming the dominant religious experience in a new, changed social environment. In Klein and Quist's worldview, then, minimal if any tension (comic or otherwise) exists for the child of two traditions in the ways outlined in the children's books just discussed. Instead, this new "half" identity supersedes all traditions that came before it.

Chrismukkah: A Multicultural Romp

The term *Chrismukkah* was popularized on the television show *The O.C.* during its first season in 2003, though certainly some interfaith families had held dual holiday celebrations beforehand. The idea is only somewhat fleshed out in *The O.C.*—it is celebrated by the Cohen family, which has a Jewish father and a Protestant mother; Seth, their son, claims to have come up with the idea for the holiday at the age of six. Chrismukkah on *The O.C.* is basically about presents: eight days of presents and one day of "many, many" presents. The following year, however, Ron and Michelle Gompertz, an interfaith couple from Bozeman, Montana, launched www.chrismukkah.com and followed up with a Chrismukkah cookbook. Chrismukkah immediately attracted notice.

In 2004, it was listed on *Time Magazine*'s list of buzzwords for the year.[225] *USA Today* referred to it as a revenue-generating "faux holiday," suggesting that it had garnered enough cultural recognition to be making money.[226]

Two years later, Ron Gompertz published *Chrismukkah: Everything You Need to Know to Celebrate the Hybrid Holiday.*[227] The blurbs on the back of Gompertz's book came from such elevated sources as *The New York Times*, which raved, "The double barreled holiday offers an excuse to eat mashed potatoes and potato latkes in the same sitting, with candy canes and chocolate gelt for dessert." *The Wall Street Journal* observed, "Chrismukkah puts a name to something millions of families are already celebrating." "A victory for interfaith families," announced the *Chicago Sun-Times*. The reviews of *Chrismukkah* signal a sharp break with the cultural environment of the 1970s and 1980s, when the mainstream media reacted to rising rates of interfaith marriage with stories about Jewish groups' concerns. The glee with which Gompertz's *Chrismukkah* was welcomed ("It is as if Martha Stewart married Jon Stewart," announced the *Missoulian*), suggest a world in which, at least in some circles, intermarriage could be celebrated.

Gompertz frames the celebration of Chrismukkah as a multicultural romp, suggesting that the holiday celebrations could be unmoored from the story of the Christ child or the miracle of long-lasting oil—or perhaps more importantly, the story of Jewish survival against oppression and assimilation. People who loved their heritage but did not

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[225] "The Year in Buzzwords," *Time Magazine*, December 20, 2004.
[226] Michael McCarthy, "Have a Merry Little Chrismukkah," *USA Today*, December 16, 2004.
[227] Ron Gompertz, *Chrismukkah: Everything You Need to Know to Celebrate the Hybrid Holiday* (Stewart, Tabori and Chang, 2006); ibid.

believe in the truth claims of their traditions could enjoy Chrismukkah. He presents the practices of Chrismukkah in an ironic tone, using retro images with kitschy titles, as well as the occasional snatch of sarcasm or insult. Gompertz's use of irony allows him to humorously defuse tensions associated with blending Christian and Jewish practice in order to articulate strongly held convictions about interfaith life. Additionally, he elides theological differences, focusing instead on recipes, music, and assorted practices. For most interfaith families, he insists, truth claims and institutional religion are not relevant to their lives in the first place.

Gompertz argues that Chrismukkah already existed in many interfaith homes, but he also clearly felt the need to introduce it on a more popular scale. "I need to admit something up front. Chrismukkah is pretend. It doesn't exist. It's made up. Wishful thinking. A holiday hoax." He points out that it would not "get you in good with God," or "bring you spiritual enlightenment." It is, however, a way to have fun during the holiday season by letting go of the "December Dilemma" of Hanukkah *or* Christmas in favor of enjoying both. With this perspective, he argues, Chrismukkah could be a '"merry mish-mash' season as real as Santa Claus, Hanukkah Harry and the notion of 'peace on earth and good will toward men.'"[228] Chrismukkah, Gompertz argues, provides a chance for couples to create their own American melting pot traditions out of whatever aspects of their plural heritages they wish to preserve. These traditions are selected in a form of millennial capitalism in which the act of consumption becomes part of a "discourse of possibility," in this case, possibilities for claiming and shaping complicated constellations

[228] Gompertz, *Chrismukkah*, 10.

of practices.[229] While Chrismukkah itself was a celebration for American families containing Christians and Jews, Gompertz told NPR that he hoped it would inspire other kinds of interfaith families to create their own holiday fusions.[230]

Chrismukkah solves what Gompertz sees as a distinctly modern American problem. He explains that "like most interfaith couples," he and his wife were not religious, were uninterested in converting to their spouse's religion, were proud of their cultural heritages, and were curious about their spouse's tradition. While aware of the notion that celebrating both religions confused children, they wanted to "respect and honor" both sets of traditions and raise their daughter to be "informed, tolerant, and balanced." He also argues that, "[a]s a multicultural family, we are part of a growing demographic trend in America that is a by-product of our country's melting pot history. From this perspective, Chrismukkah is more than just a pretend holiday about two incompatible religions." Rather, he claims, seen with the long view of history, Chrismukkah is part of "an evolutionary continuum as old as Judaism and Christianity." Not only does Gompertz present his dual-tradition holiday as cultural, rather than religious, but also his use of the word *evolution* suggests that his secular and blended holiday is part of the inevitable forward march of progress in American society. Whether or not he is correct about society writ large, he certainly makes a case for normative

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[229] Kathryn Lofton, *Oprah: The Gospel of an Icon*, 1st ed. (University of California Press, 2011), 22.
While Lofton points out that not all consumption offers the promise of shaping who you are, some does. The implication is that consumer choice is presented as holding potential for spiritual growth and formation.

[230] "Mixed Families Set to Celebrate 'Chrismukkah' : NPR," *NPR.org*, December 15, 2006, http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=6630803.

multiculturalism as the overarching, unifying value system for a certain type of self-identifyingly non-religious interfaith families.

His rumination on the origins and purpose of Chrismukkah is the only serious piece of the book. Despite his earnestness, the rest of the text is tongue-in-cheek, a joyously ironic celebration of all things kitsch, using a tone that is a persuasive cultural marker meant to imply both savvy and sophistication. The book contains goofy recipes for combining traditions, such as the matzo bread house, which is unconcerned that matzo is a Passover food, not a Hanukkah food. The fact that the author does not take himself seriously is evident throughout the instructions, which note that one should hot glue the non-chocolate candy to the house. He then adds, as an aside, "Don't use the hot glue on the chocolate. What are you, stupid?"[231] A similar tone arises in the recipe section, which names a Long Island Iced Tea recipe the "Passion of the Iced." This play on the Passion of the Christ skirts the fact that the Passion story is associated with Holy Week and Easter, rather than Christmas. It also avoids the fact that Passion plays have, historically, increased tensions between Christians and Jews, often resulting in anti-Semitic violence during Holy Week. Gompertz then employs satiric irony in order to sidestep some of the historic and theological tensions between Christians and Jews.

Gompertz's book describes customs that fuse elements of Christian and Jewish foodways and traditions in a lighthearted, kitschy style that offers the interfaith family a smorgasbord of new family traditions and potential practices. His website sells the accouterments of the holiday. In 2010, the site listed a kit for the matzos house, blue and white Christmas tree ornaments decorated with menorahs, and Chrismukkah cards. The

[231] Gompertz, *Chrismukkah*, 52.

site, with its soundtrack of Christmas carols played by a klezmer band, has been live for seven years. Clearly it has found a niche. Gompertz explains that Chrismukkah is "about throwing everything up. As garish, as busy, as multicultural as we could make it." He does so in response to a perceived need of interfaith families and is rewarded with media attention and popularity.[232]

Even though Gompertz refers to Chrismukkah as a “holiday hoax,” and even though both the New York Board of Rabbis and the New York Catholic league have denounced it, the holiday exploits a largely unspoken fact: many interfaith families celebrate holidays from both sides of the family. "It is a bit of a spoof, a bit of a satire, but it's something that is very, very real for those of us who are in mixed marriages and have to battle the feelings of our spouses, the feelings of our in-laws,” Gompertz said in a 2006 NPR interview. “And when things get too heavy, it’s a good time to make light." “Making light” involves sidestepping theology, focusing instead on nostalgia and fun, a move that Gompertz repeatedly asserts is typical of what most interfaith families do and want.

Yet though he embraces a move away from theologically oriented holidays, Gompertz allows that his spoof could go too far. For instance, in his NPR interview, he noted that he created the new holiday food of "gefilte goose" because "gefilte ham" seemed fundamentally disrespectful to Jewish tradition. This distinction is interesting in part because so much of Gompertz’s celebration already thoroughly offends both the

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[232] Chrismukkah has similar buzzword status to “Festivus, the holiday for the rest of us” popularized by the television show Seinfeld in 1997. Chrismukkah, however, strives to blend elements from Christmas and Hanukkah for the sake of religiously blended families, whereas Festivus’s practices are largely invented. Rather than blending traditions, it serves as an antidote to the material natures of both holidays—a holiday of protest, rather than of synthesis.

Catholic hierarchy and the Jewish Board of Rabbis. Together, the groups argued, "We…want to see the spiritual integrity of all faiths fully protected. Chanukah and Christmas celebrated during the same period should not be fused into some cultural combination that does not recognize the spiritual identity of our respective faiths. Copying the tradition of another faith and calling it by another name is a form of shameful plagiarism we cannot condone."[233] As shying away from the gefilte ham indicates, Gompertz indeed means no offense. He does not, however, share the perspective that Christmas and Hanukkah were the "traditions of another faith." Rather, he contends that he and his wife could maintain the traditional Christian and Jewish practices in their own families while remaining "not religious."[234] Gompertz regards both his cultural Judaism and his intermarriage as a natural cultural progression—one that could, with a healthy touch of irony, be celebrated.

Gompertz claims that he enthusiastically supports other holiday combinations, both with other religions and other Christian and Jewish celebrations, although he created Chrismukkah, not "Eastover." As both Christian and Jewish cultural critics have long pointed out, there is a largely secular and very materialistic component to both Christmas and Hanukkah, hence the cries of "Put the Christ back in Christmas" on the part of some Christian clergy and objections to lavish Hanukkah celebrations as inherently part of Jewish assimilation to American culture (since Hanukkah is traditionally a minor holiday in the Jewish liturgical year). Because many Americans locate Christmas and Hanukkah

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[233] William Donohue and Joseph Potasnik, "Joint Statement on Chrismukkah: Catholic League and New York Board of Rabbis", December 6, 2004, http://www.catholicleague.org/joint-statement-on-chrismukkah-catholic-league-and-new-york-board-of-rabbis/.
[234] Gompertz, *Chrismukkah*, 16.

primarily in the cultural terrain of holiday parties and holiday shopping, they lend themselves to fusion.

Chrismukkah, then, was not so very different from attempts to give Christmas and Hanukkah equal time in the display windows of the local shops. Though there are certainly commercial elements to Easter and Passover, with Easter bonnets, baskets, chocolate bunnies, Ten Plagues finger puppets, and *haggadot* for every demographic, these holidays cling more tightly to their religious stories of resurrection or liberation. They do not determine the profit margins for American retailers. They also do not prompt many Christian and Jewish jeremiads about secularization and assimilation.

Christmas and Hanukkah are both holidays with complex historical relationships to the market. As Leigh Eric Schmidt points out, the modern Christmas was so "enmeshed in consumer culture" that "amid the shopping, the cards, the Toyland Santa Clauses, the packages, and the lights, the festival of winter seemed once again to allow only marginal room for Christ."[235] Schmidt was writing about the early twentieth century, but his work makes clear that many moments in American history have seen the festival of consumption dwarf the nativity. When Gompertz draws on Christmas apart from Christ to create Chrismukkah, he is pulling from an array of traditions that are tied to the market and already enjoyed by Americans—including many whose families, though historically Catholic or Protestant, no longer consider themselves Christian. Similarly, by the turn of the millennium, American Hanukkah came with an array of traditions tied to market trends. Andrew Heinze names consumption as the common denominator of Christmas and Hanukkah, a way for "American practice and attitude" to infuse the

[235] Leigh Eric Schmidt, *Consumer Rites: The Buying and Selling of American Holidays* (Princeton University Press, 1997), 188.

traditional form of Hanukkah. That said, he also maintains that it ceased to be a holiday about the rededication of the Temple.[236] American society, then, has long had celebrations of Christmas and Hanukkah that play down the theological import of the holidays in favor of their consumer and festive elements. Chrismukkah largely draws from these established and overlapping trends.

While Gompertz markets Chrismukkah cards on his website, the early twenty-first century also saw such cards available in mainstream grocery stores not only in New York City, but also in places like Atlanta, Chicago, Seattle, and their suburbs. The cards serve a niche market and are more likely to appear in grocery stores in Jewish neighborhoods. They tend to be grouped on the border between the Christmas cards and the Hanukkah cards. Made by two of the major greeting card companies in the United States, American Greetings and Hallmark, the cards are sold individually, rather than in packages of 8 or 10. They range in tone from the sentimental to the comic, but all of them create common ground by denuding the holidays of one kind of religious content—references to Christ or Judah Maccabbe—and replacing it with a new set of religious values: family, tolerance, friendship, joy, and unspecified wonder.

The sentimental cards mention the (unspecified) “miracles of the season" or stress other kinds of themes, such as what all people share: "We celebrate two different stories with different traditions, but one hope we all have in common—a world filled with comfort and care." Some of the cards make specific reference to the practices of Judaism and Christianity: "A menorah in the window and an evergreen wreath on the door show that holiday feelings are filling our homes and loving good times are in store. The joy and

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[236] Andrew R. Heinze, *Adapting to Abundance* (Columbia University Press, 1992), 79.

beauty of this time of year remind us of the wonderful people in our lives. People like you."

If the more sedate cards lean towards neutral colors, ornaments, evergreens, and menorahs, the humorous cards often feature brightly colored homages to Santa humor. One card pictures Santa sitting on a snowy rooftop, sharing a drink with his friend the Fiddler on the Roof. The caption inside reads "Tis the season, whatever the reason!" Another Santa card depicts the yarmulked elf calling out to his team of reindeer, "On Isaac! On Izzy! On Eli! On Abe! On Levi! Inside, it reads, "Merry Hanukkah!"

Only a few of these cards are specifically designed for interfaith families. Some are cards to exchange between friends and neighbors of different traditions. For instance, a card that reads "Two traditions, one wish: Peace to you and your loved ones this holiday season," depicts next-door neighbors with a menorah in one window and a tree in the other. Another serves as an all-purpose card for one's entire circle of friends, Christian or Jewish. Its design is ingenious: on the front of the card is one-half of a menorah, with the candle flames flickering above the top edge of the card. When the card is opened, the inside of the cover depicts an advent wreath, topped with those same candle flames. The front of the card, with the menorah, reads "Whether you celebrate Hanukkah or Christmas," and opens to announce "I look at it as one more chance this year to celebrate our friendship. Have a wonderful holiday season."

While these cards target interfaith friends as much as interfaith families, they indicate a shift in attitudes toward both the winter holidays and the relationship between Christians and Jews. The early twenty-first century American culture that produces these cards sees Christians and Jews as friends and neighbors, people who would acknowledge

and participate in each other's celebrations. The cards downplay particular holidays' distinctiveness, with phrases like "tis the season, whatever the reason" and suggestions that trees and menorahs are simply accessories to the same themes of peace on earth, friendship, gifts, and merrymaking.

In several ways, this broader merging of specific holidays into the holiday season lends cultural support to the merging of the holidays in interfaith homes. First, it ritualizes and formalizes the social world that gives rise to interfaith families, one in which holiday greetings are sent across religious lines. They make it possible to buy one set of cards to send to both sides of interfaith families. Lastly, Christmas and Hanukkah are depicted side by side, their juxtaposition underscoring the holidays' shared messages of festivity, cheer, friendship, and family. "Is it Chanumas or Chrismakkah?" asked one of many cards marketable to interfaith families. "What word would best describe bringing together two different traditions to enjoy food, lights, and laughter all under one roof?"

If only a small percentage of the cards directly reference a dual celebration in one family, all of them participate in a syncretic multiculturalism that blends Christmas and Hanukkah and posits that the essential meaning of both holidays is neither the birth of a savior nor the miracle of oil, but rather peace, friendship, and merriment. The fusing of the holidays appears perfectly normal and fun, not a cause for concern. While all religious communities do not approve of Chrismakkuh, Hallmark and American Greetings are happy to sell it, suggesting they expect the cards to be profitable in at least some markets.

Conclusion

In the 1960s and 1970s, as the interfaith marriage rate was rising, the seeker model of religion, identified and explored by scholars such as Robert Wuthnow and Wade Clark Roof, created new freedom for individuals to move between religious traditions and to eclectically combine practices as they suited the individual. This new flexibility did not necessarily create space for interfaith families to blend and fuse traditions (or at least to speak publicly about doing so). In part, much seeking involved exploring non-Western traditions, and seekers were more likely to incorporate practices such as yoga and meditation into their Christian or Jewish lives (or replace those original traditions with practices drawn from Hinduism and Buddhism). As a result, while the "Jew-Bu" became more common and even accepted in certain social milieux and though the seeker model allowed people to unmoor themselves from their religious roots and be eclectic in their practices, it did not necessarily immediately parlay into creating a space in which interfaith families could combine traditions.

The rise of multiculturalism in the 1990s, however, allowed for a new form of ethnic identity, optional ethnicity, in which Americans could take on and put off ethnicity through the consumption of commodities and experiences. The increased comfort with ethnic identities, and with combining ethnicities, gave Americans a broader range of innovation in their practices, an innovation that was particularly apparent in consumer culture. In part because of Judaism's long-standing function as an ethnicity, Jewishness was melded into this mode of identity through consumption. Similarly, participants in optional ethnicity reclaimed Christian practices that were associated with national

identities, such as luminaria or Santa Lucia Day. As a result, multiculturalism combined, in the late twentieth century, with both seeker forms of religion and an approximately 50% interfaith marriage rate among American Jews to create a market culture with room to advocate for a particular, multicultural interfaith family life.

This new millennial discourse around interfaith family life takes place largely in the American marketplace, with children's and young adult books published by major publishing houses and self-published for sale on Amazon.com, novelty book celebrations of interfaith family life, and mass-market greeting cards. These popular depictions of the interfaith family advocate for combining the practices, but in keeping with a rhetorical hesitancy about combining Christian and Jewish religious practices and with the ethnic inflections of multiculturalism draw a distinction between "religion" and "culture." By locating the resulting mosaic of practices firmly in the "cultural" terrain (a terrain marked by an absence of affiliations, truth claims, or life passages), these sources advocate for the possibility of creating a multicultural Christian/Jewish home, just as one might create an Indian/Irish home.

While the conversation around the intentionally blended interfaith family carefully draws distinctions between the practices that they combine and "religion" (or practices that might conventionally be seen as religious), it also has an overarching moral message. Multicultural interfaith families are, these sources suggest, a moral good because they embody values that the authors suggest are key to a diverse society, namely tolerance and respect. In addition, they create children who, because of the blended settings in which they were raised, are better able to move between cultures and act as mediators across social difference, traits that the authors equate with success. As we have

seen, then, multiculturalism provides a lens through which to understand a moral logic of shaping the selection of practice and the framing of blended identity at the turn of the millennium. In the forthcoming chapter, we will explore the lived realities of interfaith families who have not chosen a single religion through the daily lives of four interfaith families.

Chapter Five
Living the Interfaith Family Life:
Blended Family Cultures

This is not a handbook. I bought all the handbooks. I devoured them. I threw them all away…. I want to write a book that will shelter and give people comfort and keep people company as they face the difficult choices entailed in interfaith family life.

Why? Truly, truly, one reason is because the books out there suck. They are dry little guidebooks with reasonable flat dialogues between invented interfaith couples…, people you would never want to meet in this life….These husbands say things like "What Kathy does on Sunday is her business. These wives say things like, "Why must Sam be upset about having a Christmas tree?"…Tell the truth, I want to wag my finder at the rabbi who invented [them] as an excuse to hear himself give pat answers.

—Joanna Brooks, personal reflections[237]

The epigraph above is drawn from personal writings shared with me by Joanna Brooks, literary scholar, religion blogger, Mormon feminist, and interfaith parent. She writes out of a frustration with the ways in which manuals for interfaith families address the issues of interfaith family life, arguing that the books are often published by Jewish publishing houses and written out of a fear that Judaism will be destroyed by intermarriage. It is that fear, she suggests, that produces what she considers to be "flat characters, with their scripted ignorance and their see-through dissatisfaction." She identifies the concern of the website interfaithfamily.com, that a child with a baptism and a bris will ultimately recognize that his parents lacked follow-through in both traditions, as a red herring. Rather, Joanna Brooks suggests that for the authors of these books, the future of the Jewish people is at stake, not the lives of interfaith families.

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[237] Joanna Brooks, who has recently written a memoir about her experience growing up Mormon, previously wrote a memoir based on her interfaith marriage and on raising her children in both of their family traditions. During my interviews with her and David Kamper, they shared her rough drafts with me, what she calls her "fieldnotes on her marriage and children."

On some level, the fears of these books are grounded in a statistical reality. In 2004, Sylvia Barack Fishman published a monograph entitled *Double or Nothing: Jewish Families and Mixed Marriage*.[238] Her extensive interviews explored the lives of intermarried families: families practicing Judaism, families practicing the non-Jewish parent's religion, a third religion, both religions, or neither religion. Her findings demonstrated a correlation between exogamous marriages and decreased Jewish observance. Members of interfaith marriage were, she found, less likely to affiliate with organized Judaism than households with two Jewish parents.[239] While Fishman worried that these families were more likely to affiliate with Christian organizations, in fact they were less likely to do so than were families with two Christian parents.

According to the Pew Foundation, American religious life is far from stable—rather, they go so far as to characterize it as being in "constant movement."[240] Their numbers, from 2007 surveys, place the rate of interfaith marriage in the United States at 37% (counting Protestants who married across Protestant family groups).[241] In addition, 28% of Americans have left the religious tradition of their childhood, either for a different tradition or to become unaffiliated.[242] Fully one-third of Americans "regularly" attend religious services at more than one place, with another quarter doing so occasionally. Americans are not simply attending multiple houses of worship within their

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[238] Fishman, *Double or Nothing?*.Tillich, *Dynamics of Faith*.
[239] Synagogue 3000 argues that while many Jewish interfaith families do not affiliate with Jewish communities, those that do are more committed to "Jewish involvement" than in-married families. (Ask Michael Berger for the citation for this stat.)
[240] The Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, *US Religious Landscape Survey: Religious Affiliation Diverse and Dynamic*, 7.
[241] Ibid., 37.
[242] Ibid., 25.
If movement within Protestant denominations is counted as "switching religious traditions," this number increases by 16%.

own traditions—one-fourth of them "sometimes" attend religious services of a faith other than their own for reasons other than weddings or funerals—while members of interfaith marriages are less likely to attend religious services than those married to co-religionists. Those who do attended services at least yearly, however, are more likely to attend services of more than one religious tradition (again, exempting attendance for life cycle events).[243]

Not only are Americans crossing over into each other's worship spaces, but also they are incorporating beliefs across religious boundaries. 22% of self-identifying Christians believe in re-incarnation, and 23% believe in astrology. Similar proportions of the general population believe in yoga as spiritual practice (and not just exercise) and in spiritual energy located in physical things.[244] The Pew Foundation breaks these statistics down further, by race, education level, and Christian denomination (notably, though the survey included non-Christian Americans, they did not include Jews or other religious groups in their data breakdowns.) Most important, for an examination of interfaith families, the Pew Foundation found that "Older people (those over 65) consistently express lower levels of acceptance of these kinds of beliefs compared with other people."[245]

Acceptance of drawing beliefs from multiple religious systems, then, increased with the baby boom and subsequent generations. The Pew Study does not address whether religiously mixed marriages (one's own or one's parents') makes one more (or less) likely to draw from a multiplicity of beliefs than the rest of the American

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[243] Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, *Many Americans Mix Multiple Faiths: Easter, New Age Beliefs Widespread*, 2–5.
[244] Ibid., 7.
[245] Ibid., 8.

population. What it does indicate is that when families like the ones whose religious practices and narratives are explored in this chapter combine practices or include practices from multiple traditions, they are part of broader patterns in American religion. While Christian/Jewish families have unique motivations for blending traditions, but they are not unique in doing so. As a result, explorations of how they recast religious practices or navigate contradictory belief systems may provide insight into how other Americans are also living their religious lives.

In this chapter, then, I am most interested in the implications of Fishman's conclusions that people who are “double” and people who are “nothing” are functionally the same—that the end result of either position is children of intermarriage who lack a strong educational base in either of their parents’ traditions and therefore do not affiliate with one religious tradition. Additionally, children of intermarriage are themselves statistically more likely to intermarry, creating new families that are also likely to exist outside of traditionally defined religious communities. In Fishman's work, which considers the impact of intermarriage on the Jewish community, the failure to Jewishly affiliate is a problem, because it decreases the number of American Jews and Jewish families. Her findings are in line with concerns expressed in prescriptive literature that when blended families attempt to hold both religions in their lives, the resulting narrative is confusing and therefore damaging to the children’s religious and psychological development. Such literature suggests that not only are "double or nothing" children less likely to participate in institutional religion, but also they lack strong moral formation in their lives, because the absence of family religious commitment left them with no

frameworks through which to approach both ethics and profound human questions around life's mysteries.

While these findings address the question of what is at stake for religious communities, they do not explore the lived worlds of interfaith families who have not made an overt choice to affiliate with one religious community. My research explores the lives of a number of families that were, in Fishman's terms, "double" or "nothing." This chapter offers depictions of four such families: the Kaplan/Brewster family, who raised their children primarily outside of religious community (fitting Fishman's definition of "nothing"), and three families, who have pursued one version or another of being "double."

Rather than finding such families unmoored from religious practice and moral formation, my research suggests that Christian/Jewish blended families often develop a cohesive family narrative or sense of who they are together as a family beyond denominational constraints. Instead of supporting the idea that a bi-religious household is inherently confusing to the children, this chapter argues that, for some bi-religious families raising their children in the 1980s, 1990s, and the first decade of the new millennium, a separate set of values took center stage in the family's life, producing a strong story of the family's identity. The religious or cultural rituals of Christianity and Judaism remained present in these families, only insofar as they supported internal narratives of family identity.

As chapter five has explored, however, multiculturalism offers interfaith families a way to combine practices from a multiplicity of heritages while uniting them with a set of moral values and assumptions rooted in concepts of respect, tolerance, and diversity.

In the previous chapter, I proposed that for some families, a model of multicultural identity over and above the privileging of religion as solely a set of beliefs allows them to combine practices to create intentionally hybrid and morally inflected identities. Here, this model is borne out through the example of four families who, in very different yet related ways, have redefined their religious lives in parallel with some aspects of the multicultural model. In short, these families belie Fishman's model, and instead seek to recreate new boundaries and parameters of belief and practice. Importantly, however, if the multicultural model avoids questions of contradictory theologies by bracketing those questions, either by ignoring them or through a profession of secularism, some of the families explored here explicitly use language of faith and mystery to explore their fused identities.

An Interfaith Homestead: A Christian/Jewish Alternative Lifestyle

Cultivated fields, at a farm in her hometown, surrounded Leah Kaplan's wedding. The food was mostly locally sourced, one of the bride's junior high school teachers led the band, and the bride's sisters baked the multi-tiered wedding cake. The values of simply and self-sufficiently creating an event, not because there was no other choice but because doing so had inherent meaning, animated the planning and execution of the wedding. Nods to Jewish culture—the groom's theory that his new father-in-law would dance if they played the *hora* and the bride's mother's Yiddish congratulations—blended with nods to Christianity, such as a ceremonial structure drawn from the Book of Common Prayer, though the couple removed God from the ceremony out of respect for

the many belief systems present among the guests. The couple introduced a moment of silence by saying, “We offer this silence for your own contemplation and, if you like, prayer, and for people everywhere in our world who are not themselves able to enjoy the freedom of marriage,” underscoring a commitment to equal rights in their celebratory moment. The couple performed their own ceremony in part because, like many young couples, they did not have a strong relationship with a member of the clergy of any religion.

Leah's family represents a "nothing" family in Sylvia Barack Fishman's framework. Though at times connected to Christian religious communities, they have largely lived outside of consistent Christian or Jewish community and education. Their moral, ethical, practice-driven religious lives, however, are anything but "nothing." Rather, the Kaplan/Brewster family has forged for themselves a third path: a back-to-the-land ethos that provides a central moral universe for the family, as well as inflecting the practice of their lives.[246] Dan Kaplan and Kathy Brewster initially went back to the land because they, like the homesteaders explored by Rebecca Kneale Gould, were responding to a "technological and consumption-oriented culture that they found to be spiritually and ethically lacking," not because they were trying to solve dilemmas posed by their interfaith marriage.[247] They strove to find solutions to those problems in what Gould defined as the central tenants of homesteading, an "ethic of simple living, of being a producer more than a consumer, and letting nature set the terms for one’s daily chores."[248] This ethos provided a central family identity, trumping both Kathy's Christian

[246] Gould, *At Home in Nature*.
[247] Ibid., xvii.
[248] Ibid., 2.

and Dan's Jewish heritages. As parents, when Dan and Kathy measured their success in imparting their values, it was by a commitment to simple living rather than to Jewish or Christian traditions. While their daughters had attachment to some Christian rituals, such as the family's celebration of Christmas, they did not consider themselves Christian and had differing senses of Jewish identity. None of the daughters has made their parents' scale of commitment to the land; however, they all echo those values in their own lifestyles.[249]

Kathy was born in 1950 and brought up in a New England college town where her father was a United Church of Christ minister and a professor. As a child, Kathy watched her father go south as a freedom rider and listened to stories of his being jailed in Alabama in the company of liberal activist and Yale University Chaplin William Sloane Coffin. In high school, she attended Coffin's services at Yale and went to college fired up by the possibility of what Christianity could be. When she got to college, however, she found that there were many people who shared her social justice orientation, and "they were not necessarily Christian at all.[250]"

Two years older than Kathy, Dan grew up in a middle-class Jewish family in a mid-Atlantic suburb. Teenaged Dan became deeply frustrated by his childhood congregation's failure to engage with civil rights, the Vietnam War, and other pressing social issues. When he wrote a confirmation speech that critiqued the congregation, the

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[249] My conversations with the Kaplan/Brewster family were colored by the fact that they took place less than a year after the death of Kathy's father, a retired minister and seminary professor. The family remembered the Reverend Brewster as a strong and abiding presence in their lives. While I do not doubt that he was such an influence, I must acknowledge that the timing of our conversations may have heightened the role his influence was given in the family narrative.

[250] Interview with Kathy Brewster. November 21, 2009.

rabbi would not let him deliver it, and he delivered a “censored” version before leaving organized Judaism forever. Dan left for college intent on recreating himself.

Dan and Kathy met at a small liberal arts college in the late 60s. The environment was infused with liberal, counterculture values, around the war, the planet, and gender roles. When Kathy graduated from college, they were married and drove away in their VW microbus for a honeymoon. They bought farmland, living in the bus while they built their own house. They had very little money, but were self-reliant, raising, slaughtering, and preserving their own food. Neither of them gave weight to their differing religious backgrounds in light of their shared political and lifestyle commitments.

Though ultimately Dan became a doctor and Kathy a teacher, they have continued to farm and raise animals, though on a smaller scale. For their daughters, Dan and Kathy’s early years took on the quality of family lore. Leah, their eldest daughter, focused on the creation of that first farm: “They were these two twenty-somethings from the suburbs. They learned how to build a house, do electrical wiring, all of those things, from books and from summer volunteer projects. I can’t imagine doing that myself.” That early self-reliance provided a central family story for their daughters, though they also understood and respected their parents’ decision to enter professions. “They really do value living off the land. Look at this place,” Rebecca gestured to her parents’ farmhouse and the eleven acres outside the window. “But they also valued other things that they could not give us as fulltime farmers. I don’t think it was a compromise of values, just a shifting of which values were getting prioritized.” Living simply, producing over consuming, and the natural rhythms of farming, however, have remained central to Dan and Kathy's lives, and to the environment in which they raised their daughters.

Living in rural settings limited the available religious communities. Kathy rarely found liberal Christianity, with the excellent preaching and music that inspire her. Judaism had simply been unavailable. Leah and Rebecca spoke warmly of a Methodist Sunday School, but the parents had more mixed memories of the church. In Appalachia, the family was part of a neighborhood Sunday school, with two Catholic families, a Baptist family, a Methodist family, and them. In a letter to his Christian theologian father-in-law, written in the early 1980s, Dan expressed their concerns in the following way: "The things they have covered, far too literally for me, include Noah's ark and the flood and the creation story. Rereading these, I was again horrified at the violence, the demeaning position of women, and the wrathful and vengeful nature of God. How do you feel about this kind of biblical history?"

Dan, the Jewish parent in the family, did not express concern with the Christian religious environment that they have helped create for their children. Rather, he was concerned with the literal interpretation of the biblical stories. While literal readings of the Bible are connected to certain strains of conservative Christianity, the fact that Dan went to his Christian minister father-in-law for advice suggests that his concern was not the Christianity of the group, but as he states, their literalism, and the violence, sexism, and vengeance imbedded in the Bible stories. He worried about the impact of those stories on his five- and three-year-old girls whom he hoped would develop feminist sensibilities. Dan and Kathy chose to emphasize feminist, non-violent moral and psychological development over Christian or Jewish identity formation.

In their home, the parents explained that there are many religions, all of which "are all or can all be okay." They made a point of lighting the menorah every year,

although the family's big holidays were Thanksgiving and Christmas, and Kathy herself has never attended a Passover seder. The daughters' descriptions of Christmas reveal a celebration that owed as much of its ritual to homesteading as to Christianity. The family opened stockings upon waking, but then spent the morning feeding animals, making and eating a special breakfast, and getting Christmas dinner prepared. The family listened to a reading of the Christmas story, as told in the Gospel of Luke, and gathered around the piano for Christmas carols, both at Kathy's prompting. Rebecca played the Christmas carol on the piano and Leah read the Gospel of Luke, but both report doing so to please their mother rather than because they find meaning in the practices. The family then opened presents, one at a time, so that they could be admired. Kathy encouraged everyone to save the wrapping paper for next year. The holiday, Leah noted, "is highly ritualized."

Visiting the family home the weekend before Thanksgiving, I realized that Dan, the Jewish father, was the one most excited about Christmas. He had celebrated Christmas growing up, so he did not share in the sense of being an outsider in America during the Christmas season, described by the advice manuals in chapter three. Rather, he reflected that he has always loved Christmas, particularly gifts, which he considers love made tangible. The entire family talked about the importance of making or selecting special gifts. Every year, Dan makes stained glass for his daughters and Kathy gives them hand-knitted items, a tradition that has expanded to include socially responsible gifts, such as handcrafts gathered on travels. In recent years, Leah has given handmade ornaments, Rebecca a cookbook, and Rebecca's toddler preschool artwork. Activities are also popular family gifts and are a tradition that has extended beyond the nuclear family

of origin. Leah gave her husband a “hike of the month” club as a birthday present, in which each month they go on a hike in a local park together. For all of the emphasis on presents, the gifts are framed as nonmaterialistic, in keeping with the family ethos of simple living. Both Leah and Rebecca pointed to the importance of the homemade gifts as representing time, thought, and creativity.

Leah and Rebecca's descriptions of Christmas underscore the ways in which homesteading practices rather than Christian ones took on meaning for them. First, though the chores delayed the festivities far more than the Bible reading, both sisters took them as a matter of course. More significantly, while both daughters framed the Christian elements of the holiday as meaningful to their mother, the homemade gifts and activities were clearly important to them. Not only have they brought homemade gifts into their own nuclear families but they also have framed the homemade gifts as more meaningful and valuable than things that can be bought.

When I asked Kathy and Dan how they hoped their daughters would move through the world, Kathy spoke of freedom from materialism, a love of nature, work ethic, family, and friends. Dan, echoing her, commented that family endeavors like putting up hay together are, to him, religious experiences because they promote bonding and an appreciation for hard work. Each summer involves multiple cuttings of hay, each of which has to lie in the sun to dry, though should it rain, the hay needs to be given time to dry again, a process that gave the Kaplan daughters first-hand experience with the "difficulty, chance, and careful planning" that goes into farming. "I do not enjoy the process at all, but I respect that it is hard to do, and we all did it together. We did it because of sustainability and self-sufficiency. They could have bought hay, but since they

have the land, they feel like they should grow it themselves. So it is really part of how we do things, or did things, as a family." The ritual of putting up hay was deeply entrenched in homesteading values, as well as being grounded in a connection to the land and family, ultimate concerns and values that theologians such as Paul Tillich have deemed religious.[251]

Kathy talked a great deal about her concern for transmitting values to her children. She saw specific obstacles to her success in the increasing materialism of American culture and, to a certain extent, the ways in which her daughters' life choices had differed from her own. She worried that contemporary American culture includes a sense of entitlement that she felt was not part of her generation's experience. How does one balance helping and supporting one's children, she worried, while giving them a sense of how important hard work is? Can a simple family life counteract society's materialism through example? While she joked about one child's love of shopping, her comments reflected an undercurrent of concern about that engagement with consumer culture. While social justice was verbally emphasized in their home, the realities of raising three children while sustaining a farm meant that it was not frequently modeled. Were those values transmitted? Kathy's concerns were not directly connected to the absence of religious community in her daughters' lives, but rather to her uncertainty about how her values translated into a non-homesteading lifestyle. Leah has been an urban dweller since graduating from college; Rebecca lived in a large city and a small town before returning to her hometown after getting divorced; and their younger sister,

[251] See Tillich, *Dynamics of Faith*.

Hannah, is also living in a city. None of the daughters live off the land or are as committed to simple living as their parents are.

The daughters' ethical commitments are lived out differently than in their parents' lives, but the connections are apparent. All three of their daughters participate in sustainable and democratic food processes. In almost every home, Hannah has maintained a vegetable garden. Both Leah and Rebecca shopped at farmer's markets and supported Community Supported Agriculture before locavore culture became broadly fashionable, and for many years Leah was also part of a food cooperative, in which members order in bulk, do the work of managing a communal "store" and shop on the honor system. Leah was very involved in homelessness issues in college, Rebecca carefully restored an old house, and Hannah has worked as a doula, participating in the natural childbirth culture that is tied to the feminist and counterculture values of the family. Some practices have shifted in the daughters' lives: rather than growing their own food, Leah and Rebecca are, in Rebecca's words, "committed to buying directly from farmers whenever possible." In other cases, the specific practices, for instance the gift-giving customs, continue to shape aspects of the daughters' lives. Leah and Rebecca present their choices as growing out of the family culture nurtured by Kathy and Dan, despite the very different structures of their adult lives.

Kathy and Dan did regret missing out on a community of like-minded people, which felt like a notable gap in their lives. While Kathy mentioned the absence of church, the couple seemed to miss community in general, not simply religious community. Living in rural areas that both tended to be politically conservative and to have a lower median level of education, Kathy and Dan often lacked a community of similarly educated, like-

minded peers. While they had chosen their current location in part because it is a college town, they found that, as university outsiders, the community is largely closed to them.

Additionally, Christianity had been of central importance to Kathy's parents, and Dan worried that he had let his in-laws down, in failing to show his daughters the value that religion could have. Because there "have been Brewster ministers in America for as long as there has been an America," Dan worried that his father-in-law had been disappointed to be the last Brewster minister. In that moment, Dan, the only member of the family to explicitly use religious labels to describe farming, drew a sharp distinction between homesteading and Protestantism, a distinction that perhaps was tied to the ways in which his father-in-law in particular found comfort and moral compass in faith and also to the sustenance provided by their religious community.

Rebecca suggested that she would have liked a stronger religious orientation. While she took a certain pride in her Judaism, she did not know much about Judaism or have a strong sense of Jewish tradition. Similarly, while Christian traditions, particularly her family's celebrations around Christmas, felt deeply important, they did not connect to a moral or transcendent framework in her mind. Though not confused about her religious identity or pained by these absences, Rebecca wondered if religious community and worship practices would add depth to her life.

Leah reflected on her identity, largely around the question of Jewishness. She recounted an incident that she refers to as the "first public assigning of her as Jewish." When she was in ninth grade, one of her classmates found out that her father was Jewish and said, "I knew you were Jewish because of how you look." Leah was furious, not because it would be bad to be Jewish, but because she was appalled at the suggestion that

"you can tell a person's religion by her appearance." Her college's robust Jewish community helped Leah understand the idea of ethnic Jewishness, but it did not increase her own identification as a Jew. Rather, she decided that despite being named Leah Kaplan, she was not Jewish. Living in a city with a large Jewish population, she often experienced other people's expectations of her Jewishness. As a result, she is most comfortable discussing her identity with Orthodox Jews, because when she explains that her father is the Jewish parent, they can together agree that while she has a Jewish name and "looks Jewish," she is not, in fact, Jewish. That said, despite her "wistfulness" about religious community, her agnosticism keeps her from joining a church.

The Kaplan/Brewster family did not, with the one exception of Dan's comment about haying, frame homesteading in religious terms. They did, however, provide practices and values that underscored the children's growing up and offered them a touchstone of how to be in the world. As a result, while one could observe the lack of formal religious affiliation, the largely cultural Christianity, and the absence of Judaism in the Kaplan/Brewster home in terms of what Fishman would describe as "nothing," a vibrant moral life was being imagined in the Kaplan/Brewster home. Like the family in Wolff's *The Mozart Season* discussed in the previous chapter, the Kaplan/Brewster family drew their moral system from the parts of their life that the parents shared, for the Shapiros, music, for the Kaplan/Brewsters, homesteading.

In some ways, the moral life that the Kaplan/Brewster family created bore commonalities with the concept of multiculturalism as it applies to interfaith families. The family created a moral system that reflected the egalitarianism and feminist potential that multiculturalism espoused. Unlike the multiculturalists, however, the

Kaplan/Brewster family did not make strong ethnic or cultural claims around Christianity or Judaism. Leah's teenage horror at being told she looked Jewish demonstrates this framing of Christian and Jewish identity as religious identity, and religious identity as something individual and chosen.

Unitarian Universalists for Jewish Awareness: A Third Way in a Third Tradition

When I first contacted Audrey Groff to ask if I could interview her as part of my work on interfaith families, she immediately corrected my terminology. “I dislike the term interfaith families,” she explained, “I do not think that we are interfaith—we have the same faith and it is Unitarian Universalism. We are not interfaith. We are inter-religious, because we have two religious traditions that lead us to our faith. But the faith is the same. And so I do not feel like we have compromised.” In introducing herself to me, Audrey Groff deflected a fundamental criticism of Christian/Jewish couples who choose to raise their children as Unitarian Universalists: that they have achieved a lowest common denominator of religion, lacking the ethical, theological, and ritual distinctiveness of either Christianity or Judaism. The Groff family has, according to Audrey, created a vibrant and shared Unitarian Universalist identity that preserves the elements of Judaism that Audrey wanted to share with her children and the beliefs and customs that her husband James brings to the table as well.

Audrey was raised in a Reform Jewish congregation in a wealthy Southern suburb. Her parents "were more culturally Jewish than religiously Jewish, but …[t]he whole Jewish legacy is important to them. History is important to them. Family is

important to them. And that whole Jewish geography and culture is important to them. So for me to marry someone who was not Jewish was an adjustment." That said, her parents never pushed her to date Jewish boys or not to date gentiles, nor did they suggest that she should not marry James Groff.

As a young woman, Audrey moved to the Midwest and met James, the man whom she would eventually marry. James came from a Missouri Synod Lutheran family, but was not going to church when the couple met. They knew from the start that they might have problems reconciling their backgrounds and spent much time in the dating process talking about religion and identity. They found that they shared any number of values and worldviews. James realized that he no longer believed in the teachings of his church. Being Jewish remained important to Audrey, but she came to appreciate the depth of her connection to James, regardless of their different backgrounds. At the time, a self-described "young and hypersensitive" Audrey felt deeply uncomfortable in her in-laws' church in what she described as their rural, insular community. She said that while now she realizes that the messages of damnation were for everyone, every week, at the time, she felt that they were aimed at her—as if the minister had known ahead of time that there would be a Jew in his pews and was reaching out to shame and frighten her into converting. She was the first Jewish person her future in-laws had ever met.

Ultimately, the young couple moved back to Audrey's home city and decided to be married in her parents' Reform synagogue. The rabbi had been very supportive of their relationship, talking to Audrey and lending her books, so the family was shocked when he explained that he could not perform the ceremony because synagogue policy, set by the lay board, forbade him to do so. "That just about crushed me," Audrey

remembered. Ultimately, Audrey and James were married at another Reform congregation in which the rabbi permitted interfaith marriage if the couple attended a basic Judaism class and became members. Audrey's parents left her childhood congregation, joining the congregation with the more liberal policy towards intermarriage. Their search for an officiating rabbi left Audrey and James feeling supported by her parents, but conflicted about the Jewish community.

The young couple joined one of the synagogue's new *havurot* designed specifically for interfaith couples, where the conversation continually circled back to the importance of being Jewish. [252] As important as Judaism was to Audrey, neither of the Groffs was interested in pursuing an exclusively Jewish life. "All of their conversations were oriented towards that decision," she recalled, "explaining it to Christian parents, helping the Christian partners learn about Judaism, and managing the sense of loss that they felt at giving up their own traditions." Audrey felt odd about asking James to give up whatever aspects of his heritage he wished to retain, and ultimately, he objected to the tenor of the *havurah*. "I am not going to convert," he declared. Audrey, who had never asked him to convert, understood his need to find a community with more diversity.

As a result, by the time they had small children, Audrey and James had left the Reform congregation. During a walk one afternoon, a neighbor suggested that they try the Unitarian Universalist congregation. James came home filled with excitement, unable to believe that there was a religious community that shared his beliefs. He heard his own post-Christian views reflected in the ethical messages of the Unitarian Universalist principles, which included belief in the "inherent worth and dignity of every person" and

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[252] A *havurah* (plural *havurot*) is a small group of like-minded Jews who gather for prayer services, life cycle events, and/or Jewish learning.

emphasized a "free and responsible search for truth and meaning."[253] Audrey's initial response was more moderate, but, as she continued to attended services, she frequently found the sermon moving her to the verge of tears. "The minister would be speaking to five hundred people but it would seem like somehow he knew just what I needed to hear. That is what I wanted for my family. I wanted the rituals to be what we needed, to have meaning apart from just maintaining rituals."

Audrey and James had read a number of advice manuals for interfaith couples, including the ones explored in chapter three. I asked her what she thought of authors casting Unitarian Universalism as a compromise position. Her first response was to echo Joanna's thoughts from the beginning of the chapter, suggesting that the authors of those

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[253] http://www.uua.org/beliefs/principles/
In 1961, the merging American Unitarian Association and the Universalist Church of America created a list of six guiding principles: to strengthen one another in a free and disciplined search for truth as the foundation of our religious fellowship; to cherish and spread the universal truths taught by the great prophets and teachers of humanity in every age and tradition, immemorially summarized in the Judeo-Christian heritage as love to God and love to man; to affirm, defend and promote the supreme worth of every human personality, the dignity of man, and the use of the democratic method in human relationships; to implement our vision of one world by striving for a world community founded on ideals of brotherhood, justice and peace; to serve the needs of member churches and fellowships, to organize new churches and fellowships, and to extend and strengthen liberal religion; to encourage cooperation with men of good will in every land. In 1984, purposes and principles were adapted at the Unitarian Universalist General Assembly, rewriting the above principles with non-sexist language; adding a seventh principle acknowledging the "interdependent web of all existence of which we are a part;" and separating out the sources of the principles in to a separate list. In that separate list, Judeo-Christian heritage was replaced by Christian and Jewish teachings. While the Groffs were uncertain about precisely when in the early 1980s they joined their congregation, one of these two sets of principles would have been in place when they began attending.
Warren Ross, "Shared Values: How the UUA's Purposes and Principles Were Shaped and How They've Shaped Unitarian Universalism," *UU World*, December 2000; Donald Skinner, "Time to Review the Principles," *UU World*, Spring 2006.Warren Ross, "Shared Values: How the UUA's Purposes and Principles Were Shaped and How They've Shaped Unitarian Universalism"; Skinner, "Time to Review the Principles."

manuals were interested in pushing Judaism as a solution to interfaith marriage, rather than actually aiding couples. "The Reform movement had to go through a process around interfaith families and those books see us (Unitarian Universalists) as competition," she asserted, "They don't know UUs well and they are trying to deflect competition." While she conceded that she knows many couples who experience Unitarian Universalism as a compromise, in her view the UU community may not truly be a good fit for those families. Her assessment is shared by Lee Barker, president of Meadville Lombard, a Unitarian Universalist seminary in Chicago. In his experience, couples who join congregations because of the Unitarian Universalist message ended up finding lifelong community and spiritual growth within UU congregations. In contrast, those who come to it as a "middle-ground" in which to raise children often do not become well integrated into the community. They rarely stay through their children's entire religious education and always leave the community after the children leave home.[254]

In contrast, the Groffs have found life as Unitarian Universalists very satisfying. They have created a place for her Jewish heritage in the congregation's life. Largely through Audrey's efforts, the congregation has developed a Rosh Hashanah service, a Yom Kippur service, a Hanukkah party, and a community seder for Passover. Audrey has helped to write the congregation's Passover haggadah and coordinates the highly participatory High Holidays services. When the Jewish liturgical events are coupled with the Christian calendar that the Unitarian Universalist congregation had always maintained, the couple had a community for both of their holidays. They also had a staunch tradition to pass on to their own three children—for holidays, all holidays, they

[254] Conversation with Lee Barker. October 19, 2009. Boston, MA

went together, as a family, to the Unitarian Universalist congregation, where the children see both parents participate together, underscoring Audrey's contention that they have, in the end, a shared faith. Audrey sings with the choir and therefore performs in the Christmas services and at Easter. James always reads for the High Holiday services. Their daughter chants the four questions in Hebrew at the congregational seder on Passover. [255] The UU community anchors the family's religious practice, both Christian and Jewish, preventing the dual holiday calendar from feeling bifurcated.

The Groff's particular UU community might be described as inherently interfaith, though Audrey sees it in a slightly different light. The Jewish celebrations that she and others have incorporated into the congregation's liturgical life have been warmly embraced by many non-Jewish persons in the congregation, leading Audrey to reflect that "something is happening here. These traditions and rituals are no longer exclusively

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[255] Both Unitarians and Universalists historically identified as liberal Christians. As early as the 19th century, both denominations, but in particular the Unitarians, were interested in exploring wisdom from other world traditions, particularly Hinduism and Buddhism, incorporating aspects of their philosophies and practices into Unitarian life and thought. For more information on early UU interactions with other religious traditions, see Thomas A. Tweed, *The American Encounter with Buddhism, 1844-1912: Victorian Culture and the Limits of Dissent*, New ed. (The University of North Carolina Press, 2000); Leigh Schmidt, *Restless Souls: The Making of American Spirituality* (HarperOne, 2006).
In the twentieth century, as both Unitarians and Universalists moved in the direction, post–World War II, of an atheist humanism, congregations attracted occasional Jewish members, some of whom approached the tradition with an interest in cultural assimilation and others of whom brought elements of their Jewish heritage with them, occasionally into their congregational life. UU clergy and congregations interpret the reference to Jewish heritage in the UU principles (see previous footnote) in a variety of ways. Some see it as a politically correct reference to biblical texts and as an acknowledgement of the UUA's long-standing working relationship with liberal Judaism. Others see it as permission to draw from Jewish thought, liturgy, and practice. Still others consider it a mandate to do so. Regardless, whether or not individual congregations draw from Jewish sources or whether individual clergy and congregants are comfortable with including Jewish holidays and rituals in congregational life, the highest articulated ideals of the Unitarian Universalist movement allow space for including aspects of Jewish identity.

Jewish. They are Unitarian Universalist as well." In this way, in Audrey's congregation, Unitarian Universalism takes on many of the practices and ethical teachings of Judaism, creating an inherently hybrid tradition. Audrey, then, finds no conflict between the UU tradition in which she is raising her children and the Jewish heritage that she wants to transmit to them.

The meaning-driven understanding of practice in UU congregations fits well with how Audrey understands Jewish practice, and she rejoices in seeing Jewish practice become meaningful to a broader community. In incorporating Jewish practices into UU liturgical life, Audrey and James reflect assumptions rooted in the very multicultural understandings of practices previously discussed. Just as, for participants in optional ethnicity, being of Irish lineage is not necessary in order to take Irish step dancing, find it meaningful, and incorporate it into one's identity, so, for Audrey, being ethnically Jewish is not necessary for finding meaning in Jewish practice. When I attended the seder, led by Audrey, her congregation's two ministers, and their music director, many people explained that they had never been to a seder other than this one at their UU congregation, but it was integral to their annual liturgy and a source of inspiration and meaning. The entire congregation, or at least the 100 people in attendance at the seder, were, at a few points during the year, optional Jews.

The Groffs are unusual in the extent to which their congregation supports their Jewish practice. One of their ministers, a Jewish UU herself, is very involved at the national level in the Unitarian Universalists for Jewish Awareness (UUJA) group. She has provided support for lay-led initiatives, includes Jewish themes in sermons and worship on Sunday mornings, and encourages other clergy to do the same. The

congregation is large, and while the extremely energetic Audrey spearheads much of the Jewish inclusion, she has help from others in the congregation, be they of Jewish heritage or not. As a result, Jewish life is braided into the communal and congregational life.

Unitarian Universalism, however, has congregational polity, which means that immense variation exists in the ritual lives of UU communities. Time on the UUJA listserv suggests that many Jews, some intermarried, some not, in UU communities are not as happy as Audrey Groff. First, Audrey's community has long called itself a congregation, rather than a church. For many Jews in UU communities, their community's self-description as a church, either officially or informally by members, feels exclusionary. Similarly, some Jewish UUs resent being responsible, as the "Jew in the congregation," for ensuring that Jewish holidays are observed. While they would prefer to see the minister shoulder responsibility for Jewish observance in communal life, some clergy to prefer that congregants spearhead Jewish ritual inclusion perceived as ethnically Jewish because of concerns about religious appropriation. While not all Jews in UU congregational settings share such negative experiences and Leah Hart-Landsberg, president of UUJA, sees increased Jewish ritual in UU congregational life, these responses demonstrate that, because of both regional differences and congregational polity, not all Jewish spouses in interfaith marriages find UU communities to be supportive of maintaining and transmitting their Jewish identities.[256]

The Groff family celebrates both Christian and Jewish holidays at home and in their religious community, framing each holiday in terms that fit with their shared Unitarian Universalist ethos. Audrey explained two aspects of their family traditions:

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[256] Hart-Landsberg, "Conversation with Leah Hart-Landsberg, President, Unitarian Universalists for Jewish Awareness."

first, they focus on what she and James view to be the metaphoric meaning of the holidays. Chanukah became a holiday of religious freedom, and Christmas was framed in typically UU terms: *every* night a child is born is a holy night, engendering the hope for peace on earth and goodwill towards men (and presents). Easter centers on rebirth and Passover on religious freedom and civil rights.[257] Her children are well versed in biblical stories of all of the holidays and in Jewish blessings and Christmas carols.

Their religious calendar has created some tension, particularly with Audrey's relatives. Audrey's sister married a Jew from a more observant background than her own and left their Reform upbringing behind for Modern Orthodoxy. When the sisters get their families together for Passover, they disagree over how to conduct the seder. Her sister and brother-in-law use a haggadah that is largely in Hebrew, with, according to Audrey, little translation or discussion of the underlying meaning of the holiday. The Groff children find their aunt and uncle's seder to be long, boring, and alienating. By contrast, when her sister's family came to seder at the Groff house, Audrey and James used the haggadah that Audrey wrote with her UUJA group. Audrey felt that her sister and brother-in-law were dismissive of her seder. She expressed frustration that her sister cannot say to her, "Your way is not my way, but I respect it" and feels that they should alternate years, and methods of doing the seders.

Similarly, the Groff celebration of Christmas has caused tension with the same relatives. Audrey's sister refuses to visit the Groff house while the Christmas tree is up, which means that Audrey and James cannot host a family Chanukah party. That policy

[257] This formulation of Passover strikes the Groffs as very Unitarian Universalist but is, in point of fact, broadly accepted in mainstream Jewish communities; and while the understanding of Easter is exclusively metaphoric, the metaphor itself is common in liberal Protestant contexts.

led to a temporary rupture between the families, when Audrey refused talk to her sister's family. Now, she clears away the Christmas decorations before she hosts them for a New Year's lunch. "Yes, it is my house," she reflects, "but I don't need to make other people uncomfortable. Besides, James and I like to begin the New Year with a clean slate, so I like to get the holiday things put away." While Audrey feels that her children have a strong Jewish heritage, her sister clearly disagrees. Audrey sees her sister's opinion as representative of the larger Jewish community. A feature on her UUJA group in the local Jewish newspaper pained Audrey because it treated her efforts as a betrayal of Jewish community rather than a way of sustaining and broadening the reach of Judaism.

Beyond holidays, the Groffs have created their own family traditions. They make a point of lighting Shabbat candles at a family dinner on Friday nights, but they also light a flaming chalice, the symbol of Unitarian Universalism, before every meal, often using chalices made by the children in Sunday school. Although Audrey did not articulate a meaning for the chalice lighting, it echoes the lighting of Shabbat candles, which the family does intentionally to maintain Jewish customs in the home. The family's chalice lighting roots their shared UU faith in a communal and daily practice. While much less of James's family's theology and religious practices is present in their home, the foodways of his family are meaningful to him, and Audrey carefully plans holiday meals to include the Midwestern recipes of his childhood. Food, she half-jokes, is his religion, explaining that whenever they return to Missouri, his mother and aunts cook exactly the same meals—she can write out ahead of time what they will eat. While James has left behind his family of origin's theologies, by learning his family recipes and including them in

special family dinners, Audrey has helped him to transmit to their children some of the special memories of his Lutheran childhood.[258]

Audrey and James are proud of the ways in which they have given their children a connection both to their values as a couple and to their families, although those familial connections have not been consistently smooth. Audrey believes her children feel secure in their identity and is pleased they have sought out college religious communities. Their daughter is involved in the UU students' group at her college. As a freshman, their son went to the Jewish students' group for Chanukah. He called home and said, "Mom, all of the kids said the blessings in Hebrew." "Did that bother you?" she asked. "No. I just said them in English. Some of them did not know what the Hebrew meant!" Encoded in that story is a sense of the Groff family values and their conviction that their way of doing things is better—they would prefer their children know the meaning than the Hebrew.

While the Groffs have transmitted much of what mattered to Audrey about her Jewish heritage to their children, they have not done so by the terms of the broader Jewish community or in ways that are necessarily sustainable in other UU congregations. It is unclear whether her children would be comfortable in Jewish communal life: while they have knowledge of some Hebrew prayers, for instance, they are not familiar with Jewish liturgical or communal life. Should they want to become active in other UU communities, they may find that many communities lack the level of support for Jewish

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[258] For more on the idea that food is intimately connected to Protestant religious and cultural experiences, much as it is conventionally understood to be part of Jewish religious and cultural experiences, see Sack, *Whitebread Protestants*.
For more on the way that foodways function specifically in the lives of interfaith families, see Samira Mehta. "'I Chose Judaism but Christmas Cookies Chose Me': Food, Identity, and Familial Religious Practice in Christian/Jewish Blended Families" in Benjamin Zeller, Marie Dallam, Reid Neilson, and Nora Rubel, eds. *Religion, Food, and Eating in North America* (New York: Columbia University Press, forthcoming)

tradition of the one in which they were raised. Of course, the Groff children may not be bothered by UU congregations that do not offer High Holiday services, or, like their mother, they may take pride in contributing to and shaping a congregation's ritual life.

Though the Groffs were clearly conscious of themselves as religiously blended, they sought out a religious community and identity that was, like the Kaplan/Brewster family, values-based, then marshaled the traditions and resources of their natal religions to support what they articulate as a shared faith. Sometimes that process required reinterpreting or reinventing traditions, which they were happy to do when necessary. If the Brewster/Kaplans followed a third way because it was more important to them than either of their traditions, the Groffs forged a third way that lifts up what they believe to be the best of their traditions. They have found a way to do so in religious community, but have had to do much of the work of shaping the Jewish elements of their new community. Additionally, while that third way has many of the values and traditions that Audrey sees in Judaism, she was quick to note that by his choice, very little of James's Lutheran heritage had been preserved in their home, beyond a few recipes. She sees them as creating a Jewish Unitarian Universalist household, with Jewish holidays, Christian holidays, Shabbat candles, Missouri Synod foodways, and dinnertime chalice lighting, in which all of the practices are recast into a cohesive system of meaning drawing on UU thought. Though critics have considered UU communities as a lowest common denominator, for the Groffs, it is a shared third path.

Give and Do: A Mormon/Jewish Family Life[259]

Every night, when Joanna Brooks puts her four and six-year-old daughters to bed, she gives them a choice of prayers: "Would you like to say the *Sh'ma*?" she asks, "or a Mormon prayer or a silent prayer?" The Mormon prayer, from her own tradition, takes an epistolary form. Joanna has taught her daughters a feminist version, drawing upon Mormon theology of both a Heavenly Mother and a Heavenly Father, so her girls begin "Dear Heavenly Father and Heavenly Mother" before offering thanks and requesting blessings. Joanna also taught them the *Sh'ma*, traditionally the last prayer that Jews say before bed, from their father's tradition. She says that because it is the shortest of the prayers— the simple recitation, in Hebrew, of the statement "Hear, O Israel, the Lord is our God. The Lord is one"—it is often the one that she hopes for in the bedtime routine. Her oldest daughter made up the silent prayer herself and has explained to her mother that the silent prayer is a time when she asks God, without words, about things that really matter to her.

One night, after praying the *Sh'ma*, Joanna and her four-year-old daughter had the following conversation, which synthesizes her parents' interfaith approach to family life:

"Mommy, how do you know the *Sh'ma*?"

"I learned it."

"Did Daddy teach you?"

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[259] While Mormonism is distinctive enough from other forms of Christianity that I have been asked many times whether their differences shape my analysis, I am focusing on the process of combining traditions rather than the actual theological or practical details of their combination. As a result, the distinctive features of Mormonism matter only in that their differences from Judaism need to be addressed, but its differences from other forms of Christianity are not highly relevant.

"No. I love your Daddy and so I listened and I watched and I learned Jewish things."

"Does that make you Jewish?"

"I don't know. What do you think?"

"Hmm. I don't know. You know, sometimes when I have a question, I close my eyes and ask God in my heart." Amelia closed her eyes and thought, before continuing, "Okay. You have a Jewish God in your heart and a Mormon God in your heart. The Jewish God is the Daddy God and the Mormon God is the Mommy God and they are all the time together, sharing Jewish, sharing Mormon. And they have two children, a boy and a girl, who are Jewish and Mormon. And they are all of the time together, changing and changing, back and forth, back and forth."

"That is a lovely vision, Amelia."

"I have a song, Mom. Here it is: We are sharing our feelings, Mormon and Jewish. We are sharing together. If you are a kid, then you have both. The grown-ups only have one together, but if the daddy is Mormon, that's okay. And if the mom is Jewish, that's okay. They are sharing together, they are having fun together. That's the whole song. It is called 'Give and Do.'"

Joanna shared these stories with me as a window into the minds of her children. Amelia's vision of sharing theologies, practices, and stories reflects Joanna and David's mode of interfaith parenting. The couple emphasizes building a repertoire of narratives for and with their daughters through which they can grapple with what Joanna terms "mystery." Amelia's stories, much like her parents' approach, focuses on the process of interfaith religious life rather than on the product of religious identity.

When Joanna and David met, she was living a "Jack," or unorthodox, Mormon lifestyle, having become disillusioned with the LDS Church after a number of feminist and intellectual Mormons were fired from their teaching positions at Brigham Young University during her undergraduate years.[260] David, who has a self-diagnosed "Jesus allergy," says that in hindsight, he was probably open to dating a Mormon because, as he explored Buddhism, he was practicing his own ability to be nonjudgmental. He added that he thought Joanna was so beautiful and smart that he did not ask as many questions as he might have, and therefore did not quite realize at first what he was getting into by dating a Mormon. The couple dated for three years before marrying in what Joanna refers to as the most blended wedding they could devise, with a Mormon officiant for the vows, a rabbi for the ring ceremony.

As a family, the household has a dual religious and liturgical life. At the time of my interviews, their daughters were ages four and six. Both had either attended or were attending Jewish preschool. The family had Shabbat dinner weekly and had recently become more frequent attendees of their local Mormon ward, though the parents noted that they normally just attended the children's parts of the service. While they had not been holding the traditional Monday night activity and religious study time known as "family home evening," their six-year-old had recently come home from Sunday school asking about it. Joanna said that while her initial response was that they did not have time

[260] Jack Mormons are lapsed or inactive members of the LDS church, who often live lives that are not in keeping with Mormon religious practices, but who also maintain a loose identification with the LDS Church, rather than rejecting it outright. They might not feel comfortable (or bother about) attending church because of lifestyle choices, particularly with overtones of alcohol consumption—hence, the "Jack" (as in apple jack); they might, especially in the past (1950s and earlier) have attended or still attend church but drink.

for family home evening, she had corrected herself to tell her daughter, "If family home evening is important to you, then we will celebrate it."

The family keeps a modified, but dual religious calendar. They attend High Holidays and *Simchat Torah* services at the local Reconstructionist Synagogue, where they also attend other child-centered events including family and “Tot Shabbat” services for children. Of late, they have hosted a break-fast gathering after Yom Kippur, for all of their Jewish friends in the neighborhood, many of whom are also in interfaith marriages. They attend David’s parents’ Passover Seder and a Hanukkah party with his extended family. Every year, they host their own holiday party with latkes, tamales, and a toy drive for the reservation where David, an anthropologist, does his research. They celebrate Christmas and Easter, though they do not have a Christmas tree and neither Santa nor the Easter Bunny visits the girls. Though they do not decorate with a tree, they do put up a crèche for Christmas. The couple explained that David felt an instinctual "allergy" to both a tree and to Jesus, and while Joanna felt that although Jesus was central to her faith and necessary in her family life, the tree was not central.

In their home, Joanna and David stress "meta-conversations" and understand that sometimes the children may be confused. "But," Joanna explains, "life is confusing. So someone might cry a bit? Crying is part of choosing and searching, and finding a path." She points out that the religiously consistent message of her own upbringing did not prevent her from crying, and she does not expect her children's processes to be totally free from stress and confusion. The expectation that her children will grapple with Judaism and Mormonism demonstrates Joanna's commitment to raise them as children who will engage deeply with traditions—their “bothness” is not intended to replace deep

engagement with either tradition. If anything, Joanna and David hope that the contrasting stories and messages will encourage deeper questioning and exploration of each heritage.

David reflected that the primary tension for him around the dual heritage comes from concern for his parents. "I am in a mental war with myself because I cringe at the possibility of my girls saying something from church, because I know the word Jesus is radioactive to [my parents]. I worry about what the girls learn at church coming out in front of my parents." In the end, he said that there is always the possibility that one of the girls will share aspects of their Mormon identity with his parents that will make the grandparents quite uncomfortable, "but then," he said, "my parents will need to deal." David's concern reveals an awareness that the theoretical knowledge that their grandchildren are both Mormon and Jewish may feel very different to his parents than it would to be confronted with aspects of that reality, but he expects his parents to develop the flexibility necessary to help him and Joanna nurture the girls in their dual identities.

Both parents hope that they have provided the girls with a repertoire of stories and practices that will help them navigate their adult lives. As scholars of cultural studies, the couple is careful not to dichotomize the categories of religion and culture, suggesting instead that the practices and worldviews that they share with their daughters are all formative. Joanna and David both talked repeatedly about having meta-conversations with the girls, a process that Joanna identified as part of her own "pet theory" about interfaith parenting. She believes that the more meta-conscious the family is, the better it works. The parents, then, reflect with their daughters about what it means to tell narratives that are, at times, contradictory and to participate in multiple communities and

practices. They are largely transparent with their daughters about the tensions inherent in those life choices.

David, who agrees with Joanna's theory, suggested that the couple's attitude came from their own scholarly work with American Indian culture, where the question of literal truth is less important. Joanna agrees, saying that in her case, she was deliberately drawing from the way that native people understand their stories. "Native people do not deal with the questions of whether the story is true: this is the story that makes me who I am." In terms of her own life, she says, "I have resigned doctrinal certainty. But the narrative structure is important to me. I teach my children about God as Mother and Father. If they start out with literal understandings, that is okay…. But to me these are stories, and they are beautiful stories that hold me in place. This issue of 'literally true' is not as important." Resigning doctrinal certainty did not lesson the importance of the narratives in Joanna's mind—they remain one of the primary media through which she experiences sacrality. Without doctrinal certainty, then, the act of telling the narratives, be they Mormon or Jewish, becomes a religious practice in and of itself. The narratives become metaphors of mystery, identity, and community; and both the telling and the reflecting on the telling become family practices underpinning the process of religious exploration.

David and Joanna recognize that sometimes the messages of those theologically rooted stories are contradictory, but they are comfortable allowing the narratives to remain in tension, offering their daughters entry points into a mystery that is, Joanna pointed out, confusing even without multiple theological stories. In this regard, the Mormon and Jewish stories exist for the Brooks-Kamper daughters in the ways that, for

children who grow up in religiously liberal homes with one tradition, creation stories exist alongside picture books explaining dinosaurs and evolution. In the Brooks-Kamper home, however, there is simply an additional complement of narratives.

Joanna suggested that the girls, especially their older daughter, are already separating the two religions according to the two families. She explained that she and David elicit meta-commentary from the girls, exploring how they experience being both Mormon and Jewish. One day, she asked their older child what it is like to "do both" religions and their daughter, age six, responded, "I am never around both sets at once. I can do the Mormon thing when around Mormons and Jewish stuff when I am around Jews. But I have more of a taste for the Jewish stuff." Right now, for Amelia, there is no conflict between the identities because they are modes of being that exist in contexts: Jewish with Jewish relatives and in Jewish spaces, Mormon with Mormon relatives and in Mormon spaces. She is, however, experimenting, both with the idea of having a preference and with sharing that preference with her Mormon mother.

Every now and then, Amelia will slip into the "wrong" context, and Joanna has realized that she can self-correct. Because Amelia is six, and starting to learn about death, and because one of her grandfathers has a progressive illness, her parents have provided her with two different narratives for death. The Mormon narrative, as filtered through Joanna, is "You are going to go be with your family; you are going to go be with your ancestors." Joanna reflected that for her, that claim has some "non-literalistic bandwidth, because your ancestors might all be in the ground." Joanna, however, finds the idea very comforting and wants her daughter to have that comfort. Amelia also knows the Reform Jewish belief that people stay alive in memory. In this framing, there is no resurrection to

look forward to. The parents are open with the children that "we do not know what happens next, but these are two important ideas, the Mormon idea and the Jewish idea." One day, Joanna explained that they were at the dinner table with a Jewish aunt, and they were talking about what happens when people die. "And I saw her be very careful," Joanna remembered, "and switch. She said that we will be with our ancestors. Then she stopped and corrected herself, to say we will be with them in our memories." At six, Amelia has a clear sense that some of the stories in her repertoire are shared ground with her father's family and some are shared territory with her mother's, and she makes attempts to keep those stories separate. Her own comment about "never having to be both at the same time" suggests that she is conscious and deliberate in separating those narratives, as does her willingness to self-correct.

Joanna and David are aware that the major questions of the next five years will be whether the girls will receive Mormon baptism, conventionally given at 8, and then whether, at thirteen, they will become *b'nai mitzvah*, literally, "children of the commandments," in the Jewish coming-of-age ceremony. Both rituals involve processes of study, though the Mormon process is a private, parent/child-focused study while the Jewish process is more formal and involves enrollment in religious education. When describing Amelia's baptism, which could occur in a year and a half, Joanna emphasized the role of Amelia's own choice: it is most important to let her make her own decisions. Therefore, they spell out the requirements for baptism, that she must read and discuss the Book of Mormon with Mommy every night before bed and then the bishop will ask her questions before baptism. Joanna and David were very clear that the Mormon sets of questions are not strict questions of doctrine. Amelia would not, if she chooses to be

baptized, be asked if she accepts Jesus Christ as her Lord and Savior. Rather, she will be asked about her understanding of God and of baptism. Her parents joked a bit about what would happen if Amelia discussed Heavenly Father and Heavenly Mother, but neither offered a serious commentary in our conversations about what might happen when either of the girls shares her feminist Mormonism with authority figures like their bishop.

The next coming-of-age event after baptism will be Amelia's bat mitzvah. (Emma will be baptized in between, should she choose to be, but conversation focused on Amelia, who, as the oldest child, is the developmental and social pioneer of the family's religious journey.) While language of choice was prominently featured in the parental discussion of baptism, Joanna and David seemed more definite about the looming bat mitzvah. "We both see them becoming bat mitzvah. That is an 'out-loud' goal for us," said Mormon Joanna. I asked whether they would be able to find a rabbi to give a bat mitzvah to a child who was a baptized Mormon. "That will be a real challenge," Joanna acknowledged. David responded more forcefully:

> My response has always been this: It is none of their fucking business. "I am paying for you. Bar mitzvah my goddamned kid." I also feel like any rabbi who would say that to me is not a rabbi whom I would want to baptize, excuse me, bar mitzvah my kid in the first place. That if you cannot handle the complexity, they really, you are going to try to force that…. Here is my kid that wants to participate in Jewish life and you're going to tell them that because of something they did when they were younger, they can't? Well, eff you.
>
> Joanna responded directly to David, rather than to me, when she said:
>
> Here is a third way: They made a good spiritual choice when they were 8. If we have no options, and we run into a rabbi and the rabbi who we think would be best to bat mitzvah them, who is most friendly to our situation, really feels like they can't do this because of Jewish law, then they have a *mikvah* and get baptized again. So they make another spiritual choice [later]. Our principles for raising them the whole way have been

> consistent. These are our two traditions. You have the power to make good choices. You need to make deliberate, thoughtful choices.

David's depiction of the rabbi providing a commercial service underscores a fundamental assumption of the Brooks/Kamper method: the religious traditions have wisdom to offer, but the religious leaders do not (or should not) have ultimate religious authority. The parents, and as they mature, the daughters, are the religious authorities—a failure to support their decisions becomes not a disagreement about approach so much as an inability to work with the family's complex reality. In this way, he echoes the multicultural approach explored in the previous chapter—identities can be taken on and taken off and are available in the religious marketplace. Joanna's comments about spiritual choice, however, depict the weight the couple gives the decisions and the efforts to which they go in order to address them. If baptism needs to be erased with *mikvah*, so be it. Another baptism is always possible later, if that choice seems best.

While David suggested that he might be being naïve, he simply could not see their family being part of a synagogue that would deny his girls bat mitzvah training and celebrations because of previous choices to be baptized. Parents of interfaith children sometimes seek out religious ceremonies for their children in an attempt to gain communal acceptance for their children (as interfaith blogger and interfaith parent Sue Katz-Miller points out, having had a bar mitzvah helps interfaith children defend their Jewish identities).[261] The Brooks-Kamper family is aware of those realities, but as can be seen above, Joanna defined decisions surrounding baptism and bat mitzvah as spiritual choices for her daughters, choices that their father demonstrated, in his slippage between the terms, that he sees as inherently valuable and equivalent, for all of their differences.

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[261] http://onbeingboth.wordpress.com/2011/01/10/interfaith-child-the-bar-mitzvah-plan/

The idea of choice intersects with the couple's understanding of the options presented by their traditions, though both seem to think that the girls will choose to be Jewish. David pointed out that the choice is not between Mormonism and Orthodox Judaism, but rather between Mormonism and liberal Judaism, which means that a Jewish choice allows both drinking and having premarital sex. As a result, a Jewish choice would better match the progressive American tenor of their lives. Joanna sees the children choosing Judaism in part for what it offers, but also because the liberal, feminist Mormonism in which she finds strength is not the mainstream, institutionally available Mormonism to which the girls will have ready access. Joanna points out that, in her view, it is the responsibility of the religious organizations to make themselves appealing enough to attract her children. It is not her job, or David's, to make religious choices for her children. If her daughters remain feminists, she believes they will be Jewish, because Judaism offers more progressive options.

While Joanna acknowledged that it may be hard for her children not to see choosing a religion as siding with one parent over the other, she returned to Amelia's "Give and Do" song, saying that what was important to her about that song was the message that in the end, everything was okay. "There will be back and forth, and changing, but there is a loving context for this discovery. All children want to please their parents with their religious choices, that is inevitable, but what would be terrible would be for them to feel torn. And so if it kills me, I am going to keep telling them, you make a good choice and I will be proud of you." Joanna continued, "I just don't think that my tradition offers them [enough]…. I won't be mad at them if they do not choose my tradition, because it is a hard place to be and be a girl." David added, "And we always say

that it is not a permanent choice anyway," a point that he articulated throughout the conversation—the girls will be able to move fluidly between their two religious positions.

By embracing a consumption-oriented understanding of religion, based both in David's avowal that if he is paying a rabbi, the rabbi should bat mitzvah his kid and in Joanna's argument that the religious organizations needed to attract members in a market economy, the family demonstrates elements of the modes of consumption shared by multicultural interfaith families. In addition, the switching that Amelia described to her mother, being Mormon with Mormon relatives and Jewish with Jewish ones, is in keeping with optional ethnicity. Multiculturalism, however, trades on equivalencies, in which practices become meaningful as symbols and constituents of identity, but is not concerned with nuances of meaning. The Brooks/Kampers are very focused on meaning, though unconcerned about contradictions. For them, Mormonism and Judaism are not to be separated from self-reflective meta-conversations about meaning, God, and spirituality.

The Brooks-Kamper home engages selectively in both Mormon and Jewish religious practice and keeps narratives from both traditions alive in their home. They cultivate a prayer life in their daughters, who see their parents engaging with both religious communities. They believe that the best tools with which they can raise their daughters are a deep knowledge of their dual heritage and the skills to make thoughtful choices, in their faith lives and in the rest of life. They aspire leave their daughters no doubt that they are loved and supported, regardless of which choices they make. The emphasis, then, in this family, is on process rather than on product.

The Interfaith Family Project: Two Traditions in One Community

Yes, we have chutzpah. We decided to politely ignore everyone who thinks my son is not Jewish because his Judaism is patrilineal. We decided to politely ignore everyone who thinks my son is not Jewish because he has been educated in both of his family religions—Judaism and Christianity….We made our own decisions, and chose our own labels.

—Susan Katz-Miller "My Interfaith Son: The Bar Mitzvah and Coming of Age" www.onbeingboth.wordpress.com

One May day, I arrived at a small Unitarian Universalist church for a bar mitzvah. Inside, a community was getting ready, the mother handing out programs by the door and directing people to a big basket of beautiful *kippot*. Recognizing me as the visiting ethnographer, Sue Katz-Miller, interfaith blogger and proud mother, told me that one of the many ways that they were living out their values in the ceremony was by "springing for" those *kippot*, expensive because they were made in Guatemala and purchased through a fair trade shop. I found a seat in the sanctuary, an octagonal room whose windows looked out on woods, and chatted with a family friend, the former director of the family's religious community, the Inter-Faith Family Project (IFFP), while I waited for the ceremony to begin. IFFP is a community founded as a religious school that could train children in both their Jewish and Christian heritages, but which has grown into a community with religious services and learning for adults as well.

While IFFP has long offered coming-of-age ceremonies to its youth, this bar mitzvah was their first, complete with chanting from the Torah, and so the family was very aware that they were making it up as they went along, figuring out how to braid together the strands of the bar mitzvah boy's heritage. In the end, they created a ceremony focused along themes of peace and environmental justice. Their ceremony mirrored IFFP's intention of weaving Christianity and Judaism together while keeping them

distinct and was designed to be accessible to the myriad non-Jewish relatives and friends in attendance.

While much of the *shacharit* service, or traditional morning prayers, were omitted from the bar mitzvah, three central prayers were included: the *Sh'ma*, the *V'ahavta*, and the mourner's *Kaddish*.[262] The bar mitzvah boy read from the Torah, standing next to his Jewish grandfather, IFFP's rabbi and the rabbi who served as his trope tutor, before carrying the community's Torah scroll around the room while the congregation sang. Musical pieces were chosen for their connections to the bar mitzvah's themes of piece and environmentalism with the congregation singing "*Lo Yisa Goy*," "Morning Has Broken," and "For the Beauty of the Earth," Jewish and Protestant songs referencing peace and the beauty of the natural world, respectively. Again, as in a multicultural model, those practices both signaled the bar mitzvah boy's blended identity and their equivalence was highlighted with explanations of their similar orientations towards nature and peace.

Christianity and Judaism were not only honored with inclusion of Christian hymns in an otherwise Jewish service, but they were also explicitly linked. For instance, after the bar mitzvah boy led the congregation in the *Sh'ma* and the *V'ahafta*, central prayers of the Jewish liturgy, his uncle, an Episcopal seminarian, read from the Gospel of Mark 12:28-33. In the Gospel of Mark, one of the scribes asks Jesus what the first commandment is, and in his answer, Jesus paraphrases both the *Sh'ma* and the *V'ahafta*,

[262] The *Sh'ma* is the central prayer of the morning and evening prayer services. The *V'ahavta* is a prayer commanding the Jewish people to love God, and enjoins them to remember the commandments. The Mourner's *Kaddish* is said at all services. Its text serves primarily to glorify God and its recitation is part of a year-long process and ritual of mourning for the death of an immediate relative.

centralizing their importance for Christianity, "Hear, O Israel; The Lord our God is one Lord: And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength: this is the first commandment." Rabbi Harold White, the rabbi at the IFFP who was also newly retired as the rabbi of the Georgetown University Hillel, offered commentary on the importance of the prayers in Jewish contexts and their echoes within Christianity. Finally, the IFFP's minister, the Reverend Julia Jarvis, ordained in the United Church of Christ and in the Disciples of Christ, Christian Church, led the IFFP coming-of-age ceremony, which included presenting the young man with a stone on which a blessing was written. The stone was passed around the room, so that each person could add his or her own blessing (in energy and prayer, not in writing) to the stone, giving him a tangible reminder of his community's support and love.

The ceremony ended with a laying on of hands by the entire congregation. In the mode of ordination in Protestant traditions with congregational polity, the young man was surrounded by those assembled, each of whom laid a hand on him, or on someone who was touching him, so that the entire gathering was grouped around him. The practice, traditional in many Christian settings, was, in this ceremony, linked to Jewish antecedents. As Sue Katz-Miller later reflected on her blog:

> In Genesis, Jacob lays hands on his grandsons as he blesses them, and Jewish parents bless their children on Shabbat, placing hands on their heads as they do so…. What may have seemed to some like a startling Christian element grafted on to a Bar Mitzvah, to us felt like a completely appropriate acknowledgement of the echoes and synergies in the sibling relationship between these two Abrahamic faiths.[263]

[263] http://onbeingboth.wordpress.com/2011/05/26/my-interfaith-son-the-bar-mitzvah-and-coming-of-age/

This explanation, a version of which was presented at the bar mitzvah itself, underscored IFFP's central framing of Christianity as an outgrowth of Judaism such that Jewish thought and practice underscore much of Christian life. The community asserts these underpinnings as historical fact, rather than as theological interpretation, also supporting their sense of themselves as exploring the connections and tensions between two traditions rather than forging a new, third tradition.

The bar mitzvah was a particular moment in the life of a family that is explicitly dedicated to Christian/Jewish family life. Indeed, the mother, Sue Katz-Miller, keeps an extensive blog entitled *On Being Both* and writes on interfaith family life for the *Huffington Post*. She is currently writing a book for interfaith families, forthcoming from Beacon Press. Both the Katz-Miller family and IFFP reject the idea that they are creating a new, third religion that blends Christianity and Judaism. Rather, they understand their religious lives as a way of "celebrat[ing], explor[ing], question[ing], and enjoy[ing] both traditions equally."[264]

IFFP was founded in 1995 by four women who were dedicated to educating their children in both Christianity and Judaism. From the beginning, the member-driven group has grown to include approximately three hundred children and adults, to employ a part-time minister and rabbi, and has expanded to include both a weekly "gathering for worship" and other adult programming. My conversations with IFFP members reflected a shifting sense of the community's purpose. Parents of younger children tended to explain their presence in terms of their children, and were uncertain whether they would participate in IFFP as their children got older. Parents of teens, however, tended to

[264] http://iffp.net/about/index.html

explain that they were in the community for themselves as much as for their children. Of course, these people were self-selected: I did not speak to parents of teens who had phased out of the program. There was, however, clearly a contingent of adults who considered IFFP their community, above and beyond its offerings for their children. The question of IFFP's ultimate purpose, as a permanent spiritual home or as community that exists to support families in raising interfaith children, remains a live issue in the community. The answer could have larger implications, should children raised in the community remain in the DC area. If adult children of the community wish to remain members, they would add another constituent group to the community, further complicating the interfaith negotiations.

The day that I attended a Sunday morning service, IFFP's orientation towards children was particularly evident, because it focused on thanking the Religious School teachers for the work that they did throughout the year. The primary ritual elements of the service were, however, intact, with the singing of hymns, the recitation of the Lord's Prayer, the *Sh'ma*, the *V'ahavta*, and the Mourner's *Kaddish*, prayers that are central to the community's gatherings. Afterwards, the general ethos of the service, emphasizing the values strengthened by the traditions, and some of their common messages, seemed to me to be similar to that of the Unitarian Universalists; and, because I knew that the former education director had moved on to serve as the minister of a UU congregation, I explicitly asked the Reverend Jarvis what she saw as the primary differences between IFFP and UUA-affiliated congregations. She quickly answered that their differences were primarily and very importantly liturgical. She said, "I do not think that in a Unitarian church, you would ever have people reciting both the Lord's Prayer and the *V'ahavta*—

being Unitarian is really taking a third path, and here we are walking both paths together, in community." The juxtaposition of Christian and Jewish prayers is, Julia explained, deeply important to many of the couples. Members tell the Reverend Jarvis, "You cannot imagine what it means to me to have my Catholic husband stand next to me, reciting the *V'ahavta* in our shared community." She emphasized that some members were explicitly raising their children in one tradition or the other, but wanted them to have familiarity with both traditions. Many people, however, were taking the path that Katz-Miller and her husband had chosen for their family: to educate their children in both traditions and to celebrate both traditions.

Sue Katz-Miller was very clear, both in our conversation and in her writing on her blog, that she has consciously chosen to cultivate a dual identity for her children. This is, in part, in response to the choices that her parents made for her. Sue, who was fifty when we spoke, was raised as a Reform Jew before the Reform movement came to formally accept patrilineal descent. While her mother was fully supportive of raising her children as Jews, she had not converted to Judaism.

Throughout her life, people have questioned Sue's Jewish status, an experience reflected in the quote from her blog with which I opened: "We decided to politely ignore everyone who thinks my son is not Jewish because his Judaism is patrilineal." Sue argued that there are real costs to asking a parent, usually the mother, to give up her own religious identity in the raising of her children. She respected her mother's choices, made before the feminism's second wave changed many of the dynamics and ideals of modern marriage, and she could not choose to subsume her own religious identity into that of her Protestant husband. Nor was this a choice that she could ask him to make. Such a choice

had costs in terms of feminism, but also in terms of traditions, wisdom, and family continuity lost. Sue pointed out that her parents' decisions were informed by conventional wisdom of the 1960s, which suggested that raising children exclusively as Jewish would gain them acceptance in the Jewish community. Her own experience, however, taught her that complete acceptance was not, in fact, possible, as the child of intermarriage. The tensions embedded within the Reform Jewish community around Jewish identity and interfaith marriage, particularly in their early attempts to navigate rising rates of interfaith marriage during Katz-Miller's childhood and adolescence, made it clear to her that her Jewish identity would often be read as lesser because it was patrilineal. Therefore, why should other sacrifices be made for an unattainable goal?

One of the central tenants of IFFP, as articulated by the rabbi, is that, because Christianity was born out of Judaism, Christians need a strong grounding in Jewish thought and traditions in order to completely appreciate and grow in their faith. He underscores that this is very different from the position of Messianic Judaism: in Rabbi White's view, Judaism is not made complete or even superseded by Christianity. Rather, he suggests that the traditions are deeply related and that knowledge of Judaism is how Christians can explore and come to understand the roots of their traditions. This argument, a variation of the one used in literature encouraging mono-religion families to select Judaism as the household religion, at IFFP becomes the argument for raising children in Judaism *and* Christianity without overt contradiction, because the practices, the holidays, and even the prayers work in thematic concert, creating space for a liturgical year intertwining both traditions.

The idea that Christianity is an outgrowth of Judaism does not, of course, address the figure of the Christ, however. Sue Katz-Miller's blog documents community exploration of the figure of Jesus, both as historical figure and as Savior. IFFP conversations envision Jesus as representing love, inclusion, egalitarianism, and non-tribal religion. She even mentions a community member exploring the idea of "Jesus envy," meaning "a sense that Jesus brought peace and inspired spirituality in a way that is inaccessible to Jews." At the same time, the community's conversations also address the fear and discomfort that Jesus can create for Jews "after two thousand years of some Christians labeling Jews as Christ-killers" or in contexts in which He is figured as a "weapon of exclusion." Katz-Miller emphasizes the process of wrestling with discomfort, not resolving differences in response to Jesus, and that the entire community can "share a common goal of presenting a Jesus who is not feared or forbidden, who preached on the subject of love, who inspires to this day." Such a message, she notes, does not require that IFFP families or individuals "aspire to or pretend to consistency within our families, or within our community, on the question of his divinity."[265]

In questions about Jesus, just as in conversations about the relationship between Christianity and Judaism, the community turns to a history that they frame as stripped of the inaccuracies created by theological bias. They teach the realities of Jesus as a historical figure, be he divine or not, apart from Jesus as he has been figured in subsequent Christian (and Jewish) thought. The historical Jesus on whom the community agrees is itself historically located, privileging certain aspects of Jesus as he appears in biblical texts as well as claiming the Gospels as historical artifacts of Jesus' life. IFFP,

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[265] http://onbeingboth.wordpress.com/2010/10/24/interfaith-families-wrestling-with-jesus/

then, raised certain biblical depictions of Jesus over later depictions of the Christ figure. In coming to the shared ground of the historical Jesus, the community also sacrificed some of the theological power of the Christ figure, but has created a Jesus they can all agree to engage with in adult dialogue and in the education of children.

Neither Jarvis nor White know much about the religious lives the children raised in the community retain in adulthood. Having been founded in 1995, the community is just beginning to have young adult religious school alumni. Will they affiliate, and if so, will they do so as Jews or as Christians, or will they find formal and informal groups of similarly religiously mixed people? Will those who remain in the DC area remain with or, as parents, return to IFFP? What traditions will they carry forward into their own homes? Sue Katz-Miller raises similar questions about her own children. She is aware that while organizations like IFFP are growing in number, they are located in only a few US cities. As a result, she cannot guarantee that her children will be able to find communities similar to the one in which they were raised.

While not all IFFP participants expect to remain in the community beyond their child-rearing years, only one found the community dissatisfying. Frank explained that IFFP had been wonderful to and for his family, but he found that the community's needs and interests did not match his. He suggested that the attempt to engage with both traditions prevented deep engagement with one tradition. As a result, he found that IFFP lacked spiritual depth. His Catholic wife found herself wanting to return to the rituals of Mass and prayer. Though he was the Jewish partner, he was drawn to the liturgy and prayers of the Catholic Church and had, when we talked, made the decision to convert to Catholicism. One of the only people with whom I spoke to draw a distinction between

cultural and religious identity, he explained that he still felt himself to be culturally Jewish, and he wanted his children to have a sense of themselves as cultural Jews, but he also wanted them all to have the faith life that he found in the Catholic Church.

One of IFFP's primary strengths is that it offers a dynamic religious community, intentionally focused on the needs of interfaith families above all others. When I asked IFFP families about raising children in two traditions and in two religious communities, as suggested by advice manuals such as *Celebrating Our Differences: Living Two Faiths in One Marriage* and exemplified by the Brooks-Kamper family, members pointed out that such a path means religion dominates family life. IFFP creates the possibility of a dual heritage that is less cumbersome—the two traditions require engagement in only one community. It is also potentially much less lonely—one has a community of people with a similar liturgical and holiday calendar, who also understand the joys and challenges of blended life. Rather than potentially being an outsider in two different religious communities, IFFP members can exist in a community that truly supports their endeavors.

The community lacks clarity, however, about what its goals are beyond the facilitating of those family choices. As a relatively young community, they are still exploring their roles. What will it mean to raise children in an interfaith community? Will their children have what the Brooks-Kampers call the ability to make strong, grounded choices, but be likely to choose one identity or the other? Or potentially, despite their avowals that they are not creating a third way, is that exactly what they are doing? IFFP members' concern about being viewed as creating a third path derives from two realities: first, the idea of mixing religions draws fire from outsiders. These critics argue that

fundamental differences between the religions mean that no mixture could be inherently consistent or true to the fundamentals of both Christianity and Judaism. Inherently, then, such a third way would be less than the sum of its parts. Second, IFFP includes many who are deeply connected to their own tradition and love and respect that connection in their spouses. They are not searching for something new, but rather for a way to share both of those heritages and systems of belief with their children.

In some ways, however, in creating a community that integrates practices and prayers from both traditions into their worship, education, celebrations, and ethical conversations (if not into their belief systems), they are, in fact, creating a new way of being in the world. Inherent in being an interfaith community is maintaining space for difference and dialogue, but IFFP also privileges certain narratives about the nature of and the relationship between Christianity and Judaism, searching for an understanding of history rather than faith claims to create common ground. The idea that this process is not a third way resonates with the parental generation, who have a sense of the independent tradition, but it may not have strong meaning for the children. One of those children, Eli Kane, age 17 in 2011, was quoted in a Voice of America article about the community as saying, "To me interfaith is its own thing, and I identify with interfaith."[266] If "interfaith" in this context is its own form of finding meaning, making a religious identity in which multiple truth claims are held in tension, and the practices of multiple traditions can be woven together in ways that highlight their similarities and acknowledge their differences, then being the child of interfaith marriage, and an inherently interfaith

[266] Jerome Socolovsky. "US Religious Diversity Prompts Increase in Interfaith Marriage" in Voice of America. October 5, 2011. http://www.voanews.com/english/news/usa/US-Religious-Diversity-Prompts-Increase-In-Interfaith-Marriage--131178068.html

individual becomes a distinct way of being in the world, in which a worldview is drawn from the interplay of practices and intellectual histories. More, perhaps, than any of the other examples explored in this chapter, then, the Interfaith Family Project, founded in 1996, in the midst of the multicultural movement, is theory put into practice, living out a multicultural ideology.

Conclusion

When the couples described in these families decided to marry and start families, they had different reactions to being from different backgrounds. For the Kaplan/Brewsters, their differing religious backgrounds were a non-issue. For the other three couples, they realized that there were challenges in their blended backgrounds and they sought solutions that honored what each of them brought to the table. For these families, the process of honoring meant that a single religion home was not possible. While the families made different choices about how to create a home there are some themes that run through all of their experiences.

While some of the parents valued their religious upbringings and others did not, none of them felt strong allegiance to their childhood religious institutions. Rather, they are interested in forging ways of life that incorporates practices and worldviews that matter to them. These families understand their religious homes as serving their needs: Kathy and Dan remain without a community because they have not found a good fit; Audrey and James left the Jewish community for the Unitarian Universalist community because the UU congregation better addressed their needs. Sue Katz-Miller and her

family are active participants in creating a new religious conversation about interfaith religious communities that meets the needs of blended families. Joanna Brooks and David Kamper articulated the belief that it was the job of the religious institutions to attract their children—it was not their job to instill loyalty to the institutions in their children. While each family values the religious community that they have found and dedicates time and energy to that community or regrets the absence of a community, they follow the trends outlined in chapter five and consider it perfectly acceptable to find a religious community that meets their needs or do without, rather than fitting themselves into a community.

Not only do the families exercise agency in finding religious community, but also they exercise and emphasize agency in their family religious cultures. Self-reliance is a central value of the homesteading lifestyle shared by the Kaplan/Brewsters and one of the key values that their daughter Leah emphasized in her description of the family farming practices. Agency around religious choices is more overt for the other families: the Brooks/Kampers stress to their daughters that they can and must make strong and thoughtful choices about their religious identities. The Groffs have recast the meanings of both Christian and Jewish religious holidays, and the Katz-Millers have made choices about including Christian practices in Jewish life cycle events. Individual agency is stressed in these family models—the ability to create, interpret, and combine one's own practices. While most of the families draw from both Christian and Jewish traditions, they do not do so thoughtlessly and therefore, while the logics of the juxtapositions are different in each household, each household has created a narrative that holds the practices together.

The families represented in this chapter are a sample from many that I interviewed, including families that created single-religion homes with equal care and with respect for the parent and extended family whose religious culture was not the dominant form of affiliation and families in which there was pain and confusion around the choice to be both. Those stories, however, have been told in a variety of scholarly works. These four families offer some new insight into ways that the changing American religious landscape supports new ways of creating and fusing religious identities.

While there are distinct differences in the approaches that the families took to their creation of their blended families, with the Groffs intentionally re-interpreting practices to offer shared meaning and the Brooks/Kampers carefully holding differing religious narratives in tension, each of the families brought differing practices together to create expanded fields of dispositions for their children, who are comfortable with the practices drawn from Christianity and Judaism (even in the Kaplan/Brewster household, Rebecca and Leah feel very comfortable with a limited range of Christian and Jewish practice), as well as the modes through which the family created their moral framework—homesteading in the case of the Kaplan/Brewsters, re-interpretation for the Groffs, meta-conversations and reflections for the Brooks/Kampers, and intentional interfaith dialogue for the Katz-Millers.

In addition, far from being without moral anchors, as critics of the dual-faith families feared, these families had strong and deeply intentional moral frameworks, which animate the choices that they have made about creating hybrid traditions. All four of the couples in this chapter are deeply committed to egalitarian marriages, with both men and women identifying as feminists. As a result, none of the couples really felt that it

was viable, if they were going to have marriages in which both partners contributed equally, for one partner to give up his or her own religious traditions. It simply did not strike them as fair. While I worked with feminist, egalitarian couples that found other solutions, for these families, egalitarianism meant that they could not select a single tradition.[267]

Similarly, the families all valued the needs of the individual and the family above those of the religious groups. While they understood concerns of Jewish leaders about the impact of intermarriage on the size of the Jewish population and also understood the pain relatives felt at seeing children raised outside of particular religious traditions, each family felt that they had to make the choices that were best for them, as a family unit, and best for their children, as individuals. Joanna Brooks reflected this value system when she explained that it was not her or her husband's responsibility to shape their children into believing Mormons or Jews. Rather, it was their responsibility to provide their children with the skill sets needed to make powerful spiritual choices. It is, in her view, the job of religious groups, Mormon and Jewish, to then persuade her children that they will be best served, spiritually, by membership. Sue Katz-Miller offered a similar focus on the individual when she pointed out that the Reform movement's willingness to accept

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[267] Other families, for instance, raised the children as Jewish, but let the non-Jewish parent determine much of the content of the family's Judaism. Some families treated religion and language as equivalents, raising the children in the religion of the American parent while working extremely hard to ensure that the children spoke and were connected to an immigrant parents' language, process that involved German school commitments that were as or more extensive than Hebrew School commitments or the decision raise Jewish children and to speak Spanish exclusively within the home. Lastly, multiple families created compromises in which non-Jewish men agreed to raise children as Jews and the woman agreed to either change her name or to give the children their father's last name. Each of these families saw themselves as balancing out the compromises in marriage, as they strove for egalitarian marriages.

children of interfaith marriage had, in her experience, been limited. If they could not promise full acceptance, in trade for giving up the celebrations and wisdom of half of one's heritage, then the bargain was, for the individual, a poor one. In the end, while the families acknowledge different levels of responsibility to religious institutions, they do not assume that what is best for the institutions is necessarily in line with what is best for the individuals, and as the heirs of the generation of religious seekers, they place individual needs ahead of religious institutional or communal ones.

These families have woven their interfaith identities together to create cohesive narratives, internal for their own family identities. In the families where the children have grown, it is clear that those children have developed skills for creating their own morality-based worldviews and have explored what matters to them in religious practice and identity. Because each of the families is idiosyncratic in their practices and definitions, it remains unclear, and at times unlikely, that the children will be able to replicate their parents' religious practices in their lives as adults. That reality, however, does not set them apart or adrift in the contemporary American religious landscape.

Conclusion

Interfaith families are increasingly part of the American landscape. Versions of their stories are told in our houses of worship, but perhaps more importantly on our televisions, in our movie theatres, in our newspapers, and on the shelves of our libraries and bookstores, where, in the past 10 years, books aimed at Christian/Jewish families have been joined by books celebrating and troubleshooting marriages across many "cultural" and "religious" divides. Amidst all the cultural production around interfaith families and their choices, families are attempting to make those choices and create meaningful lives, connections, and identities. Without understanding all of the different strains of cultural production and the values underpinning them, we cannot understand the landscape in which these families situate themselves. My dissertation, then, works with a wide range of material in order to get a sense of the varied terrain that blended families must navigate, not just in the American Jewish landscape, but in the broader American landscape as well.

And interfaith marriage is most definitely an American story. On July 31, 2010, Chelsea Clinton, daughter of former President Bill Clinton and then Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton, married Marc Mezvinsky in what both *The New York Times* and the *Huffington Post* described as an interfaith ceremony.[268] The leading picture for the story in *The New York Times* demonstrates the blended nature of the marriage. Chelsea is

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[268] Katharine Q. Seelye and Christine Haughney, "As Chelsea Clinton Celebrates Her Wedding, Town of Rhinebeck, N.Y., Elbows Its Way In," *The New York Times*, July 31, 2010, sec. N.Y. / Region, http://www.nytimes.com/2010/08/01/nyregion/01chelsea.html; "Chelsea Clinton & Marc Mezvinsky Married (PHOTOS)," *Huffington Post*, July 31, 2010, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2010/07/31/chelsea-clinton-wedding p_n_666338.html#s121283.

a practicing Methodist, whose religious background is nationally known because, as the daughter of a former president, her parents' religious affiliations became common knowledge for the entire country during her father's campaign and presidency.[269] Her groom's attire, a *kippah* and a *tallit*, or prayer shawl, proclaimed his Judaism for any who viewed the few wedding pictures released to the public.

Far beyond these facts of their upbringing, reports indicated that in their ceremony, the couple blended both of their traditions. Rabbi James Ponet and the Rev. William Shillady conducted an interfaith ceremony, which, according to the *Times* included both a reading of the seven blessings of a traditional Jewish wedding and the marriage vows from a traditional Protestant wedding.[270] Despite the history of debates about interfaith marriage, neither the couple, nor the bride's influential parents indicated any sense that an interfaith marriage was at all unusual or inappropriate. The official announcement from the former President and the Secretary of State referred to the ceremony as both "beautiful" and "interfaith."[271]

If interfaith marriages, particularly marriages of the Protestant elite, historically served as a chance to move into the dominant religious culture, not so for Mr. Mezvinsky, though Ms. Clinton is arguably as elite as they come. The couple married under a *chuppah*, or Jewish wedding canopy, with their elegantly calligraphied *ketubah*, or

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[269]Sheryl Gay Stolberg and Nate Schweber, "On the Trail of Chelsea Clinton's Wedding," *The New York Times*, July 16, 2010, sec. Fashion & Style, http://www.nytimes.com/2010/07/18/fashion/18CHELSEA.html.
Bill Clinton was raised as a Southern Baptist. During his time in Washington, the Clinton family attended a Methodist church, Hillary Rodham Clinton's religion since birth.
[270] Seelye and Haughney, "As Chelsea Clinton Celebrates Her Wedding, Town of Rhinebeck, N.Y., Elbows Its Way In."
[271] "Chelsea Clinton & Marc Mezvinsky Married (PHOTOS)."

Jewish wedding contract, on an easel nearby.[272] This possibility—an interfaith wedding that is markedly Jewish, yet emphatically not Jewish alone—in which the couple's different religions can be treated (at least by the principals) as a footnote to their shared backgrounds and history, exists because of a particular historical trajectory. Without both an increasingly individualized approach to religious practice and without the impact of multiculturalism on the options available to interfaith couples, a wedding like the Clinton–Mezvinsky wedding would be hard to imagine.

The couple has yet to have children, but they have recently announced that they are planning to do so. They have not commented on the choices that they will make, but more options are available to them, today, as an interfaith couple than were available to their parents' generation. In addition to the option of choosing one religion, be it his or hers, the couple can choose to move forward in their lives as they did in their wedding: actively blending and combining.

The fact that hybrid families exist and are beginning, as chapter five demonstrates, to find and create communities, does not mean that path has eclipsed other options. The choices and concerns traced out in chapter three exist in tandem with the multicultural and blended realities of chapters four and five. Chelsea Clinton's interfaith wedding was not without controversy caused by the couple's different religions. *Time Magazine* ran an article entitled "Did Chelsea Clinton's Wedding Threaten Jewish Identity?," which suggested that the "Jewish community" worried that "high profile" interfaith marriages would lead others to intermarry, a concern echoed in *The New York*

[272] Ibid.

Times.[273] The *Times* noted that it was unlikely that Chelsea would convert.[274] "Chelsea Clinton Married a Jewish Man, But Will They Raise Their Children Jewish?" asked the *Palm Beach Post*.[275] The blogosphere and internet chat rooms overflowed with opinions about whether the couple should marry and how they should raise their children, including posts entreating the bride to convert or at least allow her children to be raised as Jews.

The entreaties to Clinton to raise her children as Jews underscores an important aspect of the debates about interfaith marriage. The model of the multicultural interfaith family did not replace the model of the Jewish interfaith family. It added another compelling option, and support for that option, to the choices facing couples. The paths explored by families like the Katz Millers or the Brooks Kampers, analyzed in chapter five, exist alongside the ideals detailed by Paul Cowan and Andrea King in chapter four. Even as multicultural interfaith families gained a public conversation and as Jewish interfaith families contained aspects of hybridity, there remained multiple camps about what outcome would be best for the families, all located on a continuum between "strive to blend" or "strive not to."

The questions of interfaith marriage and families, either what they do or what Americans think that they should do, does not have a simple answer. The responses that

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[273] Allie Townsend, "Did Chelsea Clinton's Wedding Threaten Jewish Identity? | NewsFeed | TIME.com," *Time*, n.d., http://newsfeed.time.com/2010/08/05/did-chelsea-clintons-wedding-threaten-jewish-identity/; Joseph Berger, "Interfaith Marriages, Like Chelsea Clinton's, Stir Conflicting Feelings," *The New York Times*, August 4, 2010, sec. U.S., http://www.nytimes.com/2010/08/04/us/04interfaith.html.
[274] Stolberg and Schweber, "On the Trail of Chelsea Clinton's Wedding."
[275] "Chelsea Clinton Married a Jewish Man, but Will They Raise Their c", n.d., http://www.palmbeachpost.com/news/news/chelsea-clinton-married-a-jewish-man-but-will-they/nL8yF/.

shapers of culture, be they religious leaders, television writers, or members of interfaith families themselves, provide depend on a number of factors: how they define religion and culture in relationship to each other, whether they aspire to an assimilationist world or a multicultural one, whether they are comfortable living with tension or whether they seek resolution, whether they are most concerned with communal needs or with individual needs.

My dissertation, however, points to broader trends. The individual, as the primary unit of religious decision-making, had long held sway in dominant strains of American Protestantism. In 1970s popular culture, that focus on the individual looked like assimilation—the marrying couple broke away from the communal norms to establish their own needs, based on their own values. Individualism did not, however, have to look like assimilation. If, in the 1970s, the Reform movement thought that interfaith marriage could be stemmed by withholding Jewish marriage, they soon realized that they were wrong. American Jews, like American Protestants and, increasingly, American Catholics, understood themselves as individual religious actors. As a result, Jewish outreach attempts to interfaith couples strove to convince them that they as individuals, their marriages, and their families would be happiest and most fulfilled if they lived Jewish lives. Individuals, however, do not make their decisions exclusively as individuals—they make their decisions in relationship, often privileging the family as the unit for which decisions are made. As a result, in interfaith families, parents, in particular mothers, are asked to set aside their own needs in the interest of what is best for the relationships with spouse or child. Similarly, family practices coalesce in relationship and in negotiation, rather than purely as suits the individual seeker.

It was in these relational, familial units that the interfaith families could draw from multiculturalism. Multiculturalism and optional ethnicity were both predicated on an understanding of the autonomous actor (or, at most, family unit), who could choose among the various ethnic or religious practices and products available in order to shape an identity. While that identity would not be cohesive according to more broadly held tropes (it might not be entirely Jewish, Episcopalian, Irish, or Italian), it would be authentic to the self who was doing the selecting. The very act of selecting, and of putting seemingly incongruous elements together, operated according to a moral logic—one that explicitly valued difference, as long as it could be turned into occasional practice. In this way, then, interfaith families are part of the contemporary American landscape, drawing from their surroundings, largely through their consumption, to make distinctly American and blended identities. Purely consumption-based models of multicultural identity formation, however, fail to capture one of the key elements of interfaith family life, developed in chapter five. Much material for multicultural interfaith families assumes that these families exist without reference to religious organizations or beliefs. Chapter five argues that there are blended interfaith families who are deeply connected to religious narrative and community. These families took as fundamental their own ability and authority to decide what was best for themselves and for their families, but they did not necessarily do so by sidestepping tension or by existing exclusively in the realm of practice. They reshaped and reformed, sometimes creating new, blended forms of their traditions or shaping interfaith sensibilities, different from the sensibilities of their component religions.

The many ways of negotiating interfaith family life, then, are in part tied to the many ways of negotiating what it means to be an American individual and also to late twentieth century and early twenty-first century shifts in what that might mean. Does being an American individual mean being inherently Protestant or does it mean being multicultural? Does it mean choosing the best of the options available in the religious marketplace or does it mean finding the very terms of the market to be overly limiting and creating your own combinations and community? More and more interfaith families, and Americans more broadly, are choosing the latter, although those choices are not eclipsing previous models. Rather, debate between the models continues, with individual couples choosing how to shape their family lives, just as Chelsea Clinton and Marc Mezvinsky will do. While most couples will do so with less media attention, the choices they make will not necessarily be less hotly debated.

While not all families take the path of multiculturalism, the moral logic of multiculturalism helps to dispel the argument that families who choose to double their religious practices are, in effect, choosing to be "nothing," both in terms of their moral formation and in terms of their community life. Rather, my work demonstrates that there is an active value system embedded in the act of intentionally blending practices—or even, as the Kaplan-Brewster family highlighted in chapter five demonstrates—in replacing Christian and Jewish practices with another set altogether. Is that moral logic always a strong force in the actions of selecting practices? Likely not, but as practice theorists have long argued, practice exists apart from and beyond meaning. Acts of blending, intentional or not and ideologically informed or not, may not create the dispositions expected of a Christian or a Jew, but create dispositions they do. Those

dispositions are both part and parcel of the worlds that contemporary religious communities must navigate.

Increasingly, these blended identities will become factors in the American landscape. First and foremost, there are the interfaith families. Once a cultural minority, interfaith marriages and the families that they create are a full third of American families today. The needs and experiences of those families, their perspectives, practices, and choices shape how religious community, belief, and practice are understood in the United States, but they will also shape how American culture views concepts such as religious difference and the degree of permeability between different traditions. Individuals shaped in these families will be inherently hybrid individuals, regardless of whether the families chose singular or plural religious identities. They will have blended extended families and deeply intimate connections across religious lines and are likely to have experience with multiple forms of religious practices. Some of these interfaith families and interfaith individuals will seek religious community. They will, as this dissertation suggests, come to exist in any number of locations. Religious communities that cater to interfaith families exist in multiple American cities and are worthy of further study in and of themselves. More traditional mono-faith communities, otherwise known as churches and synagogues, have found themselves adapting to the presence of interfaith families in their midst. Increasingly, however, it may not be enough for churches and synagogues to tell interfaith families that they are welcome in the community if they follow the community's rules. As my own research demonstrates, there are interfaith families who want to participate, but want to do so in their own ways. As standards and expectations around interfaith families change, the churches and synagogues will need to change with

them if they wish to attract that clientele. That process will continue to play out over time and will shape what it means to religiously affiliate in the United States. Lastly, not all interfaith families and individuals will chose to join communities. They will become, as they have recently been labeled, "religious nones." Thinking about interfaith families and the people forged in interfaith families provides another window onto the world of the religious nones, allowing scholars to consider how tradition, heritage, and religious practice might live on, separate not only from affiliation, but also from identity.